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THE CRIPPS MISSION

A Handiwork of British Imperialism

BHIM SEN SINGH

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Preface

The basic research for this book was initially done for my M. Phil thesis. Since then, though some articles have been written on the subject the Cripps Mission, there has not been a full-length study analysing the various aspects of the Mission. This work, therefore, is a modest attempt to fill the gap.

This book is divided into five chapters and aims to highlight the various controversies surrounding the Cripps Mission. Chapter I provides the historical background. Chapter II discusses the purposes as well as reasons for the despatch of the Mission. Chapter III deals with Sir Stafford Cripps' brief and his negotiations with the Indian political leaders. Chapter IV and V analyse the causes of its failure and attempt to appraise where, why, and with whom the real responsibility for its failure lay.

Without the constant help and encouragement of the Dean of the School of International Studies, Professor Bimal Prasad, and more than that his valuable advice, this work would not have been possible. I am also deeply indebted to my supervisor for my research, Dr. Urmila Phadnis, for her meticulous guidance. To the staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Sapru House Libraries, I am grateful for their cooperation and their ungrudging assistance in locating material.

Needless to say, the views expressed are my own and the responsibility for them solely mine.

March, 1979

BHIM SEN SINGH

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Introduction

In the third year of the two world wars, when India was becoming restive, and British fortunes were at a low ebb, a liberal Cabinet member was sent on a mission to India to cushion the political unrest by making promises of post-war constitutional reforms. In 1917 it was the Montagu Mission; in 1942 it was the Cripps Mission.

Cripps arrived in India on 22 March 1942 with a mandate from the British War Cabinet. As set out in the Cabinet Declaration, he was to seek the participation of Indian political leaders in the government of their country during the war. The Declaration also indicated the terms on which India was to secure freedom after the war.

Sir Stafford Cripps stayed in India for more than two weeks and had several rounds of talks in the course of his negotiations with the Indian political leaders. The rejection of the Declaration by the Indian National Congress on 10 April 1942 marked the failure of the Mission. The Congress followed it up with the "Quit India" movement.

Since then, the subject has remained controversial and debatable as it has not been fully and objectively investigated. Barring a few studies, most of the literature has been either partisan or inchoate. Various aspects of the subject, such as the origin and purpose of the Mission, Sir Stafford's brief, his negotiations with the Indian political leaders, the British Liberals' professed faith in democracy and their anti-imperialist character, Sir Stafford's own *bona fides* of being a supporter of India's independence movement and lastly the factors leading to the failure of the Mission, have not been thoroughly perused in their proper perspective.

The purpose of this work is to undertake an analytical

and critical study of the subject as well as to unravel the so-called "mystery" of the Mission which till now has baffled many writers. The task of the present study, however, becomes relatively easier with the recent publication on the Mission from the official British documents.¹

"Among historians as well as philosophers", writes George V. Allen, "truth has many faces, and no man or committee is likely to see them all."² Quite naturally, there is often a lack of unanimity among the historians on the different aspects of the subject, thereby giving birth to various controversies and hypotheses.

The first controversy which comes through this study is related to the origin and purpose of the Mission on which widely varying views prevail in the writings of different historians and writers—British, American or Indian. Some of them have viewed the American role *vis-a-vis* the arrival of the Mission in India as a peripheral one and have given importance to certain other factors such as the role of the British Labour Party, Churchill's own initiatives, the Japanese advance in South East Asia, or India's political situation and the like. Others have viewed the American pressure as the decisive factor in the arrival of the Mission.

Thus, historians and writers, like A. Guy Hope, Francis G. Hutchins, Tarachand, Bimal Prasad, Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad contend that it was mainly the American pressure which had influenced the British policy makers as a whole and Prime Minister Churchill, in particular, to send the Mission. Rajendra Prasad stated that Cripps was probably sent to India because "America insisted on it".³ Maulana Azad, the then Congress President expressed similar views in his autobiography.⁴ Elaborating the same point, Tarachand writes:

¹N. Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: The Cripps Mission, January-April 1942* (London, 1970). Vol. 1.

²A. Guy Hope, *America and Swaraj* (Washington, D.C., 1968), p. iii. Foreword by George V. Allen.

³Rajendra Prasad, *At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay, 1961), p. 283.

⁴Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, 1959), pp. 38, 47, 53 and 70.

During his (Churchill's) stewardship substantial political advance was unthinkable, but for the sake of the world opinion—really American opinion, some gesture was necessary which became imperative when America declared open war against the Central European Powers and Japan.⁵

Regarding the purpose behind the despatch of the Cripps Mission, F.G. Hutchins holds the view that it was just to placate public opinion in the United States that the British Government had sent the Mission to India and had tried to demonstrate that the government had made a reasonable effort to meet the imminent invasion.⁶

M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava, however, refute the above contention and put forward their own hypothesis that the British decision had nothing to do with American pressure.⁷

On the other hand, R. Coupland, while supporting the official line, has given an impression in his monograph that it was out of the British Government's political benevolence and in accordance with its sincere belief and faith in the institution of democracy that the Mission was sent to India. The American role in the arrival of the Mission does not figure at all in this study.⁸

Reflecting another point of view, which has attributed the main reason of the despatch of the Cripps Mission to India to Labour pressures within the British Government itself, Michael Edwardes writes: "The reason for the attempt being made at all can be seen in the composition of the British War Cabinet itself." Though, to him, American pressure "always emotionally opposed to British imperialism even if she was an ally of Britain" appeared as an important factor behind the Mission's arrival, it was the British

⁵Tarachand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* (New Delhi, 1972), Vol. 4, p. 303.

⁶F.G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution* (Delhi, 1971), p. 208.

⁷M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava, "The United States and Cripps Mission", *India Quarterly* (New Delhi), Vol. 19, no. 3, July-September 1963, pp. 214-65.

⁸R. Coupland, *Cripps Mission* (London, 1942). It is necessary to note that Coupland who was already in India, was asked by the British Government to join the Mission and write the above pamphlet on the subject.

Labour Party pressure which had really counted. Churchill felt it necessary to make a gesture and in the interests of the Cabinet's solidarity it was agreed to send Cripps Mission to India.⁹ Reiterating the same proposition, R.J. Moore writes that "the Cripps Mission grew out of an initiative by Labour members of the War Cabinet".¹⁰

Viewed in its proper perspective, however, there seems to be no reason for controversy on the origin and genesis of the Mission. And it becomes fairly certain that the British Government despatched the Cripps Mission to India in response to the pressures from America and from the Labour group in the British Government itself which was led by Sir Stafford Cripps himself.

The way Sir Stafford Cripps conducted his Mission in India has also been a subject of lively discussion and debate. Eric Stokes rightly feels that Cripps' actions during the negotiations "require a great deal of explaining".¹¹

The then Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, for example, held the view that Sir Stafford was devious and deceitful who "did not play straight" with him over the reform of the Viceroy's Executive.¹² His son, Lord Glendevon substantiates this allegation and maintains that Cripps defied the instructions of the War Cabinet and that he went "well beyond his brief" with regard to the Executive.¹³ H.V. Hodson, the then Reform Commissioner also supports the Viceroy's line of thinking and maintains that Sir Stafford Cripps was foolish not to clear his ambitious plans with the Viceroy.¹⁴

All the available documents, however, show that Sir Stafford had "no will to break the bounds of the brief he

⁹Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India* (London, 1963) p. 88.

¹⁰R.J. Moore, "The Mystery of the Cripps Mission", *The Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* (Leicester), Vol. 11, no 3, November 1973, p. 196.

¹¹Eric Stokes, "Cripps in India", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 431.

¹²Penderel Moon, ed. *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (London, 1973), entry for 19 October 1943.

¹³Lord Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay* (London, 1971), p. 232.

¹⁴H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (London, 1969), p. 103.

brought from London". Anthony Low rightly regards the Viceregal circle's accusations as "quite unwarranted".¹⁵

To R.J. Moore, the Congress charge that Cripps acted evasively and betrayed it while negotiating, seems defamatory.¹⁶ This is nothing but a strong bias for Cripps. Charges of betrayal levelled by the Congress against Sir Stafford Cripps hold, as facts will show, valid ground and thus cannot be treated as a defamatory act on the part of the Congress. Sir Stafford had in the end broken his promises which he had made to the Congress leaders during the early days of negotiations in India. He tried to exonerate himself of those charges by vigorously denying them, but in vain.

Different views on the failure of the Cripps Mission too have been put forward. The official British liners have maintained that it was due to the uncompromising nature of the Indian National Congress and its leadership that the Mission failed. More particularly, Mahatma Gandhi is charged of sabotaging the Mission, who, in their opinion, had dictated the Congress Working Committee to reject the Cripps offer.

The available evidence, however, does not support this assertion. Further, the description of Cripps Mission as a "post-dated cheque on a crashing bank" is the phrase wrongly ascribed to Gandhiji by the Britishers and historians like Eric Stokes¹⁷ Gandhiji never used that expression either in that form or even in substance.¹⁸

The study of the entire episode, however, proves that the charges levelled against the Congress gave only a one-sided version and that the Mahatma was not involved with the

¹⁵D.A. Low, "The Indian Schism", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol. 9, no. 2, 1971, pp. 158-67.

¹⁶Moore, n. 10, pp. 195-6.

¹⁷Eric Stokes, No. 11, p. 427.

¹⁸Pyarelal, a long time Mahatma Gandhi's private secretary and editor of Gandhi's *Harijan* (after the death of Mahadev Desai) challenges the genuineness of this comment in his book *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase* (Ahmedabad, 1956), Vol. 1, p. 335. Pattabhi Sitaramayya also maintains that the Mahatma never used that phrase and considers this to be a 'foul play' on the part of the British just to malign the Mahatma. Amba Prasad of Delhi University in an interview with the author expressed similar views

Congress Working Committee's rejection of the Cripps offer. He was prepared only to give moral support to the British against the Japanese and German invaders and was opposed to giving help in men and money in any circumstance as that would have gone against the very spirit of non-violence. The matter was discussed by the Working Committee of the Congress and when Mahatma Gandhi did not succeed in convincing his colleagues, he withdrew from the deliberations of the Congress Working Committee, leaving them free to carry on without any obstruction from him. It was only later that the Working Committee rejected the offer.

Finally, a perusal of the data on the subject also indicates that the aims of all the British parties in power—the Conservative, the Labour and the Liberal—were more or less similar, and that all they wanted was to retain some sort of control over India, though by different means as they had different approaches to tackle the Indian problem.

While the Conservatives had preferred to follow the "lie back" policy as they had felt quite complacent about the Indian situation, the Liberals and Labourites did not agree to it and stood for some sort of reconciliatory methods to be adopted to win over the Indians and thereby ease the political tension which had surrounded the whole political atmosphere of India. They wanted to break the political deadlock so that the situation might not deteriorate to such a position where control of India would become difficult. Though other important factors were there, the 'August Offer' and 'Cripps Mission' were the direct result of their efforts and pressures which they did exert over the Conservatives, who had not bothered to take the restive India into their confidence even during the impending crisis of World War II during 1939-42.

and strongly affirmed that the phrase was not used by Mahatma Gandhi; no reference to it is found in any of his writings.

1

The Background

War and the Deadlock

With the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 and the Viceregal declaration implying India's involvement in it, an unforeseen change took place in the Indian political scene. The experiment of the provincial part of the Government of India Act 1935, which had been on trial since July 1937 and had been working satisfactorily, came to an abrupt end. The Congress ministries resigned. Constitutional deadlock prevailed. The relations between the imperialist and the nationalist forces worsened and were followed by further distrust, discontent and disorder, thereby posing a serious problem in those days of international crisis and anxiety, not only for India but also for Great Britain and its allies.

In all the member states of the British Commonwealth (except Eire) war was declared on the advice of ministers responsible to their own parliaments. Here, in India, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, threw the country into the war without prior consultations with the national leadership. Though, his declaration was technically in order as foreign policy, which included the right to declare war, fell within the purview of his responsibilities and prerogatives, it resulted in offending the Congress and in the process depriving the government of its support to the war effort.

Within a fortnight of the outbreak of the war, the Working Committee of the Congress and the Muslim League passed their respective resolutions on the crisis. In a lengthy resolution adopted at Wardha, on 14 September 1939, the Congress Working Committee took a grave view

of the Viceroy's proclamation of war, following the enactment of the amending bill and the promulgation of war ordinances—all without India's consent. "The issue of peace and war" declared the Working Committee, "must be decided by the Indian people", and they cannot "permit their resources to be exploited for imperialist aims." "If co-operation is desired", maintained the Committee, "it must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider worthy."

Condemning the "ideology of fascism and Nazism" the Working Committee maintained that though "India's sympathy is entirely on the side of democracy and freedom", it could not associate itself with a war said to be for "democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her and such limited freedom as she possesses taken away from her."

The Working Committee, however, did keep the Congress door open for future negotiations with the British Government and as such, did not take any final decision at this stage. In fact, it invited the British Government to declare what its war aims were in regard to democracy and imperialism and enquired as to how these were going to be applied to India. "The real test of any declaration" concluded the Working Committee's resolution, "is its application in the present, for it is the present that will govern action today and shape the future."¹

On 4 October 1939, Mahatma Gandhi maintained that "it will be a very serious tragedy in this tragic war, if Britain is found to fail in the very first test of sincerity of her professions about democracy."²

The Working Committee of the Muslim League which met in New Delhi on 17 and 18 September vehemently condemned German aggression and welcomed the Viceroy's declaration. However, it did not offer unconditional support to the Government of India. It condemned the

¹Congress Working Committee Resolution, 14 September 1939, in Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution* (Bombay, 1957), Vol. 2, pp. 484-7.

²Bimla Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy* (Calcutta, 1960), pp. 153-4.

federal scheme of the Act of 1935, as giving the majority community power to trample on the rights of the minorities and requested the revision of the entire problem of India's constitution *de novo*.

The resolution of the Committee put forward two conditions for giving its support to the Government: first, "justice and fair play" for the Muslims in the Congress ruled provinces for the present, and second, an assurance that no declaration would be made regarding the question of constitutional advance for India nor any constitution framed without the consent of the Muslim League.³

The Viceroy's Response to the Resolutions

"Though Jinnah demanded a right of veto on India's constitutional progress", writes Amba Prasad, "the situation was such that a settlement was possible if the Viceroy was willing to act with statesmanship."⁴ The Secretary of State for India, Marquess of Zetland and Labour Party leaders were advocating the need for a bold initiative but the Viceroy, true to his imperialist creed, was not in favour of any solution of India's constitutional problem which would have adversely affected British rule in India. As a result, he did not pay any heed to the suggestions of the Secretary of State and Labour leaders. To him, it was out of question, to consider constitutional changes in war time or to enter into any commitment for future constitutional reforms in India.

However, in the given situation, it was difficult for the Viceroy to go ahead with his complete negative approach to the demands put forward⁵ by the Congress and the Muslim League. Accordingly, he held a number of discussions with the Indian political leaders and issued on 18 October 1939 the long awaited statement of His Majesty's Government policy.

³Muslim League Working Committee's Resolution, 18 September 1939; Gwyer and Appadorai, n. 1, pp. 488-90.

⁴Amba Prasad, *British Policy and the Indian Problem, 1939-40*. Paper presented at the 43rd session of the Indian Historical Records Commission at Lucknow in January 1975. Mimeographed.

⁵*Ibid.*

This was the statement on "Government's war aims" and "war effort" as demanded by the Congress Resolution of 14 September 1939. Dominion status as proclaimed by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 6 February 1935 was to be the ultimate goal of the British regarding India. But so far as the immediate present was concerned, the colonial government was not prepared to improve upon the scheme of the government embodied in the Act of 1935.

At the end of the war, the Government, it was maintained, would be willing to enter into consultation with the representatives of the several communities, parties and interests in British India and with the Indian Princes to secure their co-operation in the framing of such modifications in the Government of India Act 1935 as might seem desirable. As at present, it was declared that a consultative group representative of all the major political parties in British India and of Indian Princes, would be set up over which the Viceroy would preside.⁶

Congress Reaction

The Viceroy's statement evoked critical comments from the Congress leaders. "If this is the final answer of the British Government to the people of India", said Jawaharlal Nehru, in the course of a joint statement with Abul Kalam Azad, "then there is no common ground between the two and our paths diverge completely."⁷ Reacting to the statement, Gandhiji regretted that the Congress had asked for bread but had got stone.⁸

On 22 October 1939, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha, condemned the Government's policy statement. It decided not to support Great Britain in the war, for that would amount to an endorsement of the imperialist policy which the Congress had always sought to end. As a first step, it called upon the Congress ministries to resign but warned Congressmen against any hasty action, like civil disobedience, political strikes and the like.⁹

⁶Gwyer and Appadorai, n. 1, pp. 490-93.

⁷Bimla Prasad, n. 2, pp. 156-6.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1957), p. 66.

Consequently, in all the eight provinces the Congress ministries, after twenty-seven months of power, submitted their resignations on a constitutional issue—the issue which was primarily all-Indian and only indirectly provincial. However, despite this attitude, the Congress was still hopeful of a settlement with the British Government.

After the resignation of the Congress Ministries, the attitude of the Viceroy to the Indian problem stiffened further. Initially, he could not afford to leave the Congress out of his reckoning. It was the largest and most important political party, speaking almost for the whole nation and forming government in eight of the eleven provinces. As such, while in office it could have easily impaired the government's war efforts and the Viceroy was wise enough to realize it.

Now, the situation had changed. Congress had committed a tactical mistake by pulling out its provincial ministries on its own initiative. This weakened its bargaining power because the Viceroy was not under any compulsion to woo the Congress so far as the war effort was concerned.

Other factors also strengthened his thinking. He surmised that the Congress might not embark on a campaign of civil disobedience in view of its earlier commitments against Nazism and Fascism. International public opinion, moreover, would condemn any such action as designed to pose a threat to the war effort. In any case, the Viceroy felt assured that the Government had ample resources to deal with any anti-government movement, aimed at paralysing war efforts.

In this setting, the talks which were held with the Indian political leaders in November 1939 and in February 1940, proved abortive. The Viceroy was loathe to hasten any real democratic change in India. He made the mutually hostile Congress-Muslim League politics an excuse for his imperialist approach and advised the Secretary of State, Zetland, to "lie back for the present" in the hope that Britain might get a better bargain.

"As a matter of fact", writes Amba Prasad, "until Amery took new initiative in June-July 1940, Linlithgow's

*policy was characterized by four guidelines viz., 'refrain from action', 'wait upon events', 'avoid running after the Congress' and 'lie back and not move.'*¹⁰

The Congress which was the major national party resented the Government's attitude and after realizing the futility of negotiations, it decided to resort to civil disobedience at an opportune moment at its Ramgarh annual session held on 19 March 1940.¹¹

During the debate in the House of Commons on 18th April, 1940, all the Labourites, except Wedgewood Benn, criticized the government's stand on the Indian issue. They asked the government to recognise India's desire for freedom and self-government and urged it to move in that direction. They also appreciated India's claim to devise its own constitution.¹²

In his statement in the House of Lords, Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India emphasized that if the vision of a united India was to become a reality, mutual agreement between the communities in India was essential. He also threatened to crush the civil disobedience movement, if it was started.¹³

Lord Snell, the Labour Peer expressed dissatisfaction with Zetland's statement. In his opinion, Indians believed that the British promises of self-government "did not constitute firm offers". Giving expression to his belief in the Indian peoples' right to self-determination, he called upon the British Government to fix a date for the grant of dominion status to India.¹⁴

After the Ramgarh session of the Congress and the adoption of Pakistan Resolution by the Muslim League on 12 April 1940, the British War Cabinet held discussions on India. The Secretary of State expressed his agreement with

¹⁰Linlithgow to Zetland, 13, 21, 27 February, 8 March 1940. Amba Prasad, n. 4.

¹¹V.P. Menon, n. 9, p. 81.

¹²U.K. Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, series 5, Vol. 359, session 1939-40, cols. 1165-79.

¹³U.K. Lords, *Parliamentary Debates*, Series 5, Vol. 116, session 1939-40 (18th April, 1940), cols. 166-75

¹⁴*Ibid.* Cols. 176-81.

the Viceroy's view that for the time being the colonial government should "lie back" and not make any constructive proposals.¹⁵

New Government in Britain and its India Policy

The deadlock in Indian politics continued. Vicissitudes of the war did not affect its controversies till the middle of April 1940.

In May 1940, the war in Europe took a disastrous turn to the disadvantage of the Allied powers in general and Britain in particular. This brought about a change of government in Britain. Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister, and L.S. Amery succeeded the Marquess of Zetland as Secretary of State for India. Linlithgow continued as Viceroy.

Churchill had made no secret of his antagonism to the nationalist movement in India. He had declared in 1930 that sooner or later the British would have to crush Gandhi and the Indian National Congress and all that they stood for. Obviously, under his stewardship, any substantial political advance in India was unthinkable. His attitude to Indian freedom was clear and definite. The same year, he had stated:

The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing control of Indian life and progress. . . . We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the Crown of the King, which more than all our dominions and dependencies, constitutes the glory and strength of the British empire.¹⁶

Making his position clear on the question of "Dominion Status" which was so frequently talked about, Churchill had stated in December 1931:

Most of the leading public men—of whom I was one in those days—made speeches—I certainly did—about dominion status, but I did not contemplate India having the same constitutional rights and system as Canada

¹⁵War Cabinet Minutes, 10 December 1939, 12 April 1940, Amba Prasad, n. 4.

¹⁶Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi, 1961), p. 438.

in any period which we can foresee. . . . England apart great from her Empire in India, ceases for ever to exist as a power.¹⁷

Further, Churchill had combated tenaciously the passage of the 1935 Act on the ground that it gave India more self-governing powers than it was fit to exercise. Since then, he had given no indication that his views on the subject had changed. It was with such a man that the Indian political parties had to negotiate the lingering constitutional problems.

In the meanwhile, on May 13, 1940, the British Labour Party's Bournemouth conference approved the actions of the Labour leaders such as C.R. Attlee in joining Churchill's wartime coalition government. A resolution (Manchester Guardian, 14 May, 1940) moved by Attlee gave the green signal to "the unanimous decision of the National Executive Committee that the Labour Party should take its share of responsibility as a full partner in a new government which under a new Prime Minister commands the confidence of the nation".

The resolution assured "its full support to the new government in its efforts to secure a swift victory and just peace". However, Gordon Macdonald severely criticized this resolution as the war being waged was "an imperialist war, fought not for the defence of the democratic institutions, but for the defence of colonial possessions of Britain and France".

This stand of the Bournemouth Conference was very important from the Indian point of view when the British Labour Party came to share equal responsibility with their other counterparts—Conservatives and Liberals.

When Amery became the Secretary of State, he was against the Viceroy's attitude and did not like to be complacent about the prevailing Indian political situation. Realizing the adverse effects of the Viceroy's policy of "lie back", he wanted a change in his attitude for the good of the British fortunes during the war.

¹⁷*Ibid*

For a month, throughout June 1940, he kept himself busy in carrying on continuous correspondence with him. He persuaded and tried to prevail upon the Viceroy to give up his "lie back" policy, make an initiative to break the constitutional deadlock, meet the Indian political leaders and thereby ease the political situation.¹⁸

Notwithstanding Linlithgow's unwillingness, Amery's efforts did produce results and in the process two schemes, one that of the Viceroy and the other that of the Secretary of State, emerged. These became the basis of the August Offer of 1940.¹⁹

Linlithgow had meetings with the Muslim League leader, Jinnah on 27 June and with Gandhiji on 29 June 1940. Jinnah put forward two conditions for the League's participation in the government. First, the British Government was to give an undertaking that no constitution for India, temporary or final, was to be adopted except with the prior approval of the Muslim League. Second, in any interim war-time government or organization, "Muslim India must have an equal share in the composition of the governments, central or provincial".²⁰

On 7 July 1940, the Congress Working Committee, accepted the advice of C. Rajagopalachari and made a fresh offer to the British Government for ending the political deadlock. Though its long-term demand was the independence of India, it toned down its earlier stand on the issue of the immediate present by suggesting the formation of a Provisional National Government at the Centre which could command the confidence of all the elected elements of the Central Legislature. This Government was to work with the provincial governments on the basis of close understanding and mutual co-operation. If this was acceptable to the government, the Congress was prepared "to throw its full weight into the efforts for the effective organization of the defence of the country".²¹

¹⁸Amba Prasad, n. 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Resolution of the Congress Working Committee, 7 July 1940, Gwyer and Appadorai, n. 1, pp. 500-01.

On 22 July 1940, the All India Congress Committee at Poona endorsed the Working Committee's Delhi Resolution of 7 July 1940 which had implicitly decided to offer its support to the government by announcing that the absolute non-violent creed was not a fitting weapon to fight external aggression and internal disorder.²²

For the time being Mahatma Gandhi's leadership was set aside as he was not willing to lead the country in a violent battle. This was the first time since his arrival on the Indian political scene that his view-point was vetoed by the Congress Working Committee on the issue of the strategies regarding the terms for India's participation in the war efforts.

The Offer of 8 August 1940

On 8 August 1940, the Viceroy issued a new declaration of British policy, known thereafter as the August Offer.

The object of the new policy was declared to be the early achievement of that unity of national purpose in India "as would enable her to make the fullest possible contribution in the world struggle against tyranny and aggression".²³

The offer stipulated that—

1. Though the differences which prevented national unity remained unbridged, the expansion of the Governor-General's Council and the establishment of an advisory War Council should no longer be postponed.
2. In view of the doubts as to whether the position of minorities would be sufficiently safeguarded in any future constitutional change, the British Government reaffirmed its desire that full weight should be given to minority opinion. "It goes without saying that they could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is

²²Menon, n. 9, p. 91.

²³His Majesty's Government's Offer of 8 August 1940, Gwyer and Appadorai, n. 1, pp. 504-5.

directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government."

3. Subject to the fulfilment of their obligations—a reference to such questions as defence, minority rights, the treaties with the states, and the position of the Secretary of State's services—the framing of the new constitution would be "primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves", and would "originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life".
4. Constitutional issues could not be decided at "a moment when the Commonwealth was engaged in a struggle for existence", but after the war a representative Indian body should be set up to frame the new constitution. Meantime the British Government would welcome and assist any efforts to reach agreement as to the form and functions of this constitution-making body and as to the principles of the constitution itself.
5. In the interim period the British Government hoped that all parties and communities would co-operate in India's war efforts, and by thus working together would pave the way for India's attainment of free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth.²⁴

Though conceding Dominion Status to India after the war, the August Declaration did not meet the Congress demand for a National Government for the interim period.

Further, the grant of veto to minorities was a serious flaw in the statement and so was the offer and the method of seeking the acquiescence of the majority in the proposed reforms. The Congress Working Committee Resolution of 7 July had come "nearest to suggesting a reasonable solution of the immediate problem". "But the response of the British Government", says Amba Prasad, "was not a positive one. A bold and courageous initiative was

²⁴For full text see Gwyer and Appadorai, *ibid.*, pp. 504-5.

called for but neither the Viceroy nor the British Cabinet were capable of taking it.”²⁵ The declared policy clearly showed the clever hand of Churchill and it reiterated in effect the policy of “lie back”.²⁶

A.B. Keith (*Manchester Guardian*, August 15, 1940) was very critical of this new declaration of British policy as it did nothing to solve the Indian problem. He maintained that part of the problem was Britain’s own creation.

According to the *News Chronicle* of August 9, 1940 the August Offer “may hasten the day on which India achieves dominion status. But everything depends on whether this move is to create a genuine nucleus of responsible government or whether it is merely another piece of window-dressing.”

The New Statesman and Nation of August 10, 1940 rightly pointed out the inadequacy of the new British policy on India. It observed: “There is no way out of this situation, save by a promise of self-determination, precisely dated for the end of the war and free from the conditions that give Mr Jinnah and the Princes a veto over Indian democracy.”

The New Leader (August 17, 1940) maintained that Amery’s statement did not “touch the fringe of the problem. The least which could have been offered to India should have been immediate dominion status.”

In the House of Commons, Labour MPs Amon and Sorensen criticized the Government’s India Policy. To them, minorities should not have been allowed to frustrate the wishes of the majority.²⁷

Lord Strabolgi, a Labourite, praised in the House of Lords the Governor-General’s statement of 8 August by emphasizing the fact that it was an honest attempt to reach a satisfactory settlement of the lingering Indian Constitutional problem.²⁸

The very trend of parliamentary debates showed the serious differences among the Labourites on the Indian

²⁵Amba Prasad, n. 4.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷U.K. Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, Series 5, Vol. 364, August 1940, cols. 870-78.

²⁸U.K. Lords, *Parliamentary Debates*, Series 5, Vol. 117, 1939-40, cols. 207-13.

issue. While one group led by Strabolgi regarded the August Offer as a working settlement, others led by Sorensen disapproved and criticized the new policy.

Commenting on it, Nehru declared that it was couched in terms which "convinced us that the British had no intention whatever of parting with power in India; they were bent on encouraging division and strengthening every medieval and reactionary element. They seemed to prefer civil war and the ruin of India to a relaxation of their imperialist control."²⁹

Once more the British Government had missed the chance of eliciting the Congress support to its war efforts. The offer was presented not as a fresh approach to the Indian problem but as a continuation of past efforts to secure India's co-operation. As neither the date nor the method of introducing Dominion Status was specified, Britain remained exposed to the charges of insincerity and procrastination.

Congress observed that the British Government had "left no doubt that they had no intention to recognize India's independence, and would, if they could, continue to hold this country indefinitely in bondage for British exploitation."³⁰ The August Offer, maintained Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, "far from easing the tension in India... has given rise to grave misgivings and has caused a great deal of resentment. . . . Hedged in by so many conditions, (it) is so incomplete in the enunciation of the aim (of British rule) and so non-committal in regard to its being implemented within any reasonable distance of time that it can afford no satisfaction whatever to the people of this country."³¹

In its Wardha meet on 22 August 1940, the Congress Working Committee rejected the offer mainly on the ground that its demand for a national government had not been considered and its ultimate demand for complete independence was not met.³²

²⁹Jawaharlal Nehru, n. 13, p. 439.

³⁰Resolution of All India Congress Committee, 15-16 September 1940. Gwyer and Appadorai, n. 1, pp. 505-6.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 518-19.

³²V.P. Menon, n. 9, pp. 94-95.

The Muslim League, expressed its inability to accept the offer in its meeting at New Delhi on 28 September 1940. It repudiated the idea of a united India implicit in the statement. The partition of India was, it urged, the only solution. Its co-operation in the conduct of the war was to depend on the acceptance of the "two-nation" doctrine and the application of the fifty-fifty principle of Hindu-Muslim representation.³³

Thus, between September 1939 and August 1940, the British Government's efforts to solve the Indian constitutional tangle for the purpose of inviting India to play its desired role in the war against the Nazis seemed to be ineffective. Its policy declaration of 8 August was a half-hearted attempt to win the Indian co-operation in the war efforts. Shortly after the Congress rejection of the scheme, Rajagopalachari had sponsored a "sporting offer" to bridge the gap between the Congress and the Muslim League.

This had been a condition of the British Government for any just solution of India's constitutional problem. Rajagopalachari was of the firm opinion that if the British Government agreed to a provisional national government being formed at once, he would successfully persuade his Congress colleagues to agree to the Muslim League being invited to nominate a Prime Minister and to let him form a government as he would have considered best.

Not surprisingly, there was no response to his offer as the British Government had not thought of relinquishing its control over India and its gesture to the minorities as embodied in the August offer was just an excuse to serve its interest.

Political Inactivity and Deadlock

Throughout this period, the imperial policy enunciated in the "August Offer" remained the pivot round which the British policy revolved. In war time there was no question of converting the Executive Council into a National Government. The Viceroy was firm on this issue and so

³³*Ibid.*, p. 99.

was His Majesty's Government. Once the Congress and other political parties and groups had rejected the offer, the British Government was in no mood to carry on any further talks with them, specially with the Congress.

In the given situation as well as in the light of the Government's attitude, the Congress realized the futility of negotiations with the Government. Consequently, when, on 15-16 September 1940, the All India Congress Committee met in Bombay, "Back to Ramgarh" was the note of President Abul Kalam Azad's opening speech. The Committee decided to launch civil disobedience movement under Gandhi's guidance. The movement was to be confined to select individuals.³⁴

On 17 October 1940 the movement began and continued for a year. Those chosen to break formal orders were imprisoned. On 31 October, Nehru was sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment.³⁵ Early in January 1941, Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress President, was arrested and was convicted for making an 'objectionable' speech.

The policy of the Muslim League was hardly more positive or constructive than that of the Congress, though the former had denounced the latter's recent campaign. From time to time, as the winter of 1940-41 drew on, Jinnah reiterated in his occasional speeches and communications to the press, his creed of Pakistan and fifty-fifty representation in any temporary constitutional arrangement during the war period. Unless and until this demand was met, the League was not to provide any co-operation in the government's war efforts.³⁶ Apparently, the League under Jinnah followed the same track of non-cooperation as the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi but for different reasons.

There was no change in the attitude of the other parties during this period.

The Hindu Mahasabha, true to its militant and communal character denounced the satyagraha campaign as injurious to the Hindu cause. It had declared its willingness to co-operate in the war efforts but, at the same

³⁴Bimlā Prasad, n. 2, p. 116.

³⁵V.P. Menon, n. 9, p. 100.

³⁶R. Coupland, *Indian Politics 1936-1942* (London, 1944), p. 251.

time had laid down conditions which implied were not so much the war against the Axis but a prospective war against the Muslims.³⁷

On its part, the Government instead of trying to break the political deadlock in those days of international crisis, tried to deepen the gulf between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. While the chosen disciples of Mahatma Gandhi were filling His Majesty's prisons in India, Amery who had earlier thought of breaking the political impasse, now voiced the traditional British policy of "Divide and Rule" which only helped to prolong the deadlock.

Speaking at a luncheon in London, Amery presented to the Indians the watchword "India First" so as to overcome their communal discord. What he really did in this speech was to emphatically tell the Muslim League that Pakistan was not feasible, to assure the Hindus that in a democratic India they would certainly enjoy the rights of the majority party, to tell the Indian Princes that their rights and privileges as sovereign rulers of their States would remain intact, though they would be required to make some improvements in their administrative machinery, and to assure the Englishmen that he would not allow India to run away from the British Commonwealth, thereby endangering Britain's prosperity.³⁸

Apparently he divided India into two groups, the Hindus and the Muslims. Implicitly, thus, he virtually decried the claim of the Congress to represent the whole of India. The Muslim League on the other hand felt offended at his ridiculing its Pakistan scheme.

Churchill, India and the Atlantic Charter

The deadlock was further deepened by Churchill. On 15 August 1941 the Atlantic Charter was signed and presented to the world by him and the American President Roosevelt. The two countries had jointly subscribed to a common peace aim, affirming *inter alia* that "they respect the right of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”³⁹

This had aroused high hopes in India. Unfortunately, such expectations were short-lived as Churchill in his speech of 9 September 1941 in the House of Commons, denied the application of the Charter to India.

He said:

The joint declaration does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government in India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire. We are pledged by the declaration of August 1940 to help India to obtain free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth of races, subject, of course, to the fulfilment of the obligations arising from our long connection with India and our responsibilities to its many creeds, races and interests.⁴⁰

Attlee, the Deputy Prime Minister, makes a Gesture

Conflicting interpretations, however, were attached to the Atlantic Charter by the Deputy Prime Minister, Attlee, and by Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister.

In his address to the West African students, Attlee declared:

We the Labour Party have always been conscious of the wrongs done by the White races to the races with darker skins. We have been glad to see how, with the passing of the years, the old conceptions of the colonies as places inhabited by inferior people, whose function was only to serve and produce wealth for the benefit of other people has made way to juster and nobler ideas.⁴¹

Here, Attlee not only made bare the creed and programme of the Labour Party, but considered the Atlantic Charter to be the conclusive proof of that stand.

³⁹V. P. Menon, n. 9, p. 109.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴¹Anup Chand, *India and the Atlantic Charter* (Lahore, 1941), p. 24.

The *New Leader* dated 13th September, 1941, wrote in its editorial.

“Mr Churchill and his Tory colleagues remain the die-hard imperialists they always were. The shame is that Labour Ministers have coalesced with them.”

Prof H. J. Laski, left-wing Labour intellectual asked the Government: “If we claim to be fighting for democracy and freedom what better way is there of proving our claim than to broaden and deepen democracy and freedom that we have?” He further went on “The new imperialism (of Hitler and Mussolini) must be met by our abandonment of that imperialism which regards colonial peoples as the fit subjects of economic exploitations.”⁴²

Not surprisingly, these appeals and arguments could not influence the British Government’s final decision to which Attlee and company had also given their consent. Result was that it enraged Indian public opinion.

The Bombay correspondent of the *Tribune* reported on 23 November 1941 that according to private information received from London, it appeared that “Mr. Attlee put up a strong fight in the British Cabinet for the acceptance of his views to the effect that the Atlantic Charter should be applied to India.” But “the Labour and Liberal parties, however, did not like to press their views to the breaking point on this issue”,⁴³ and the Conservative opinion prevailed.

Pearl Harbour and its Consequences

In December 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. This added a new peril in the Far East. War in the Pacific also directly involved the United States of America. Besides, the Japanese were establishing their naval preponderance over British navy in quick succession. By the third day of the Japanese invasion, two British naval ships were sunk.⁴⁴

⁴²H.J. Laski, *Programme for Victory: A Collection of Essays*, (London, 1941) p. 22.

⁴³*The Tribune* (Chandigarh), 23 November 1941.

⁴⁴V.P. Menon, n. 9, p. 112.

The theatre of war thus seemed coming nearer to India. As a result tension started growing in the early months of 1942. The confident belief that, in this war as in the last, no battles would be fought on Indian soil was diminished by the spectacular Japanese advance in the East in the winter of 1941-42. After the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the Bay of Bengal lay open. When Rangoon fell on 7 March, it seemed as if the tide of the Japanese conquest would soon be sweeping into Bengal and Madras.

In the meanwhile, Tokyo radio launched a propaganda offensive that the Japanese were coming to deliver freedom to the Indians, their Asian brethren. "Let Indians rise and help them to drive the British out" was the Japanese slogan.⁴⁵ The Japanese also lost no time in elaborating their co-prosperity scheme in the Southeast region. While such an appeal was emotive enough, it was yet to be seen as to how the leadership of the political parties and groups were going to respond to it.

Indian Political Parties after Pearl Harbour

In its Bardoli resolution of 23 December 1941 the Congress reiterated its demand for the formation of National Government representing the Indian people as such as the *sine qua non* of India's participation in the war.⁴⁶ Meeting almost at the same time, the Muslim League Working Committee also reiterated its earlier stand that if an equitable share and responsibility was given to it in the government at the centre and the provinces, it was prepared to help the government in its war efforts.⁴⁷

Reacting to the changed situation, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and other Indian Liberals once again made an effort to bring about unity between the Congress and the British Government. On their behalf, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru cabled a copy of their proposals to L.S. Amery and Churchill on 2 January 1942. The cable called for a bold stroke of

⁴⁵Cited in R. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission* (London, 1942), p. 17.

⁴⁶V.P. Menon, n. 9, p. 112.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 113.

far-sighted statesmanship, so as to transform the entire spirit and outlook of the administration in India.

The measures suggested in the cable were:

- (i) Conversion and expansion of Central Executive Council into a truly National Government, consisting entirely of non-officials of all recognized parties and communities, and in charge of all portfolios subject to the Crown.
- (ii) Restoration of popular governments in the provinces; failing this, establishment of a non-official Executive Council responsible to Crown, as proposed for the Centre.
- (iii) Recognition of India's right to direct representation through nominees chosen by the National Government in the Imperial War Cabinet and in all allied war councils, wherever established, and at peace conference.
- (iv) Consultation with National Government, precisely on the same footing as His Majesty's Government had been consulting the other Dominion Governments in all matters affecting the Commonwealth as a whole and India in particular.

The cable concluded thus: "...We appeal you in all sincerity but with greatest emphasis to act, while there is still time for such action, so that India may line up with other anti-Axis Powers on a footing of absolute equality with them in common struggle for freedom of humanity."⁴⁸

China Reacts Against British Policy in India

Since Pearl Harbour, China was also reacting to the developments in Southeast Asia. It was deeply perturbed when the Japanese bombers raided Shanghai and Hongkong and its armies invaded Philippines, Malaya and Burma. By 15 February 1942, after the capture of Singapore, China's sea routes were blocked and supplies could reach either by a very long land route across the Russian

⁴⁸Nicholas Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: The Cripps Mission, January-April 1942* (London, 1970), Vol. 1, pp. 3-5.

territory or by air. The Prince of Wales and the *Repulse*, the prestigious battle-ship of the British navy in the eastern waters were destroyed and the resistance of the Allied Powers in Southeast Asia was greatly reduced.

Against this background, India was of crucial importance to China as its main supply base. This led to a serious Chinese concern for the resolution of Indian constitutional deadlock. Chiang Kai-shek made up his mind to pay a visit to India in order to have a personal exchange of views with the members of the Government of India and prominent men in Indian public life.

The U.S. President Roosevelt also encouraged him to make such a visit.⁴⁹ Chiang Kai-shek arrived in India on 8 February 1942.^{*} The Government of India neither took any interest in his visit to India nor liked his meetings with the Indian leaders. While in Delhi, however, he met both Nehru and Maulana Azad besides others. On 18 February, he met Gandhiji in Calcutta.

In his farewell message to "his brethren, the people of India", he declared:

At this critical moment in the history of civilization our two peoples should exert themselves to the utmost in the cause of freedom for all mankind, for only in a free world could the Chinese and the Indian people obtain their freedom. Furthermore, should freedom be denied in either China or India there could be no real peace in the world.⁵⁰

Appealing to his ally, Great Britain, Chiang added that without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India, Great Britain should give them real political power as quickly as possible so that they "may be in a position further to develop their spiritual and material strength and thus realize that their participation in the war is not merely an aid to the anti-aggression nations for securing victory, but also a turning point in their struggle for India's freedom."⁵¹

⁴⁹R. E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York, 1948), p. 511.

⁵⁰*The Indian Annual Register* (Calcutta, 1942), Vol. 1, p. 121.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

On return to his capital, Chiang cabled instructions to his ambassadors in America and England on 24 February 1942, asking them to convey to Roosevelt and Churchill his reactions of his visit to India.

These read:

To Roosevelt: In a word the danger is extreme. If the British Government does not fundamentally change their policy towards India, it would be like presenting India to the enemy and inviting them to quickly occupy India. When I think of it I am both worried and alarmed.

To Churchill: I am personally shocked by the Indian political and military situations which are in such a state that I could never conceive of before I arrived in India. I feel strongly that if the Indian political problem is not immediately and urgently solved, the danger will be daily increasing. . . . If the Japanese should know of the real situation and attack India, they would be virtually unopposed.⁵²

Like earlier appeals and advice, whether of the Indian National Congress or the British Labourites and the Liberals, Chiang Kai-shek's warning and appeal seemed to have left Churchill cold. The Chinese appreciation of Indian political situation did not persuade the Churchill administration to modify its earlier position in relation to India.

The British Policy Remains Adamant

Despite the worsening of the war situation in South and Southeast Asia, Churchill's attitude towards the Indian problem remained unaltered. The Japanese offensive and its growing military predominance in the region did not cause any serious concern to the British policy-makers. Indian offer presented by the Indian National Congress was considered insignificant. The Indian Liberals' Scheme, contained in Sapru's cable to Churchill, which envisaged an amicable solution to India's constitutional tangle, was

⁵²*Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1942* (Washington), Vol. 1, pp. 650-60.

not appreciated. Chiang Kai-shek's advice, leading to Indian co-operation in the allied war efforts was not earnestly considered.

The conservative ruling elites, whether it be the Premier and the Secretary of State for India or the Indian Viceroy were not willing to concede to the demands of the Indian leaders, even for the purpose of allowing them to join the Allied camp. Any change in India's constitutional set-up appeared remote during their stewardship. The old political creed of the imperialist policy-makers viz., the "immediate must have preference over the future" thus still held the ground.

2

Despatch of the Cripps Mission

With the entry of Japanese troops into Rangoon on 8 March 1942, pressures from within the British Government as well as from the United States (along with the Chinese) compelled the British Administration to attempt a settlement of the lingering Indian question by eliciting the co-operation of the Indian parties to the British war efforts. While President Roosevelt, in particular, and American opinion in general, influenced Churchill's earlier policy, Labour ministers prepared and presented a strong case in the War Cabinet. Perhaps for the first time in his public life, the British Prime Minister, who did not favour any change in British policy regarding India, associated himself with political reform in India and that too, in the midst of the war.

On 10 March 1942 he wrote to the Viceroy:

It would be impossible, owing to the unfortunate rumours and publicity, and the general American outlook to stand on a purely negative attitude and the Cripps Mission is indispensable to prove our honesty of purpose and to give time for the necessary consultations.¹

United States Interest in India

Before World War II, the American public and official interest in India was nominal and sporadic. Americans

¹Churchill to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, in N. Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of Power 1942-47 : The Cripps Mission, January-April 1942* (London, 1970), Vol. 1, p. 395. (Hereafter referred to as CM).

knew little of Indian civilization, history and politics beyond a few distorted generalizations that had been cultivated for a century. Commercial relations and contacts between the two peoples had not been extensive and the nationalist movement had occasionally attracted the interest of the public and government.

During the World War, particularly after Pearl Harbour, official American interest in India steadily increased, culminating in the April 1942 mission of Louis Johnson to India. Certain factors contributed to this attitude. Firstly, the necessity for full co-operation among all non-Axis nations and the prospect of a continued Japanese advance towards South Asia had brought India military as well as political significance.

With Asia as an American battleground, the importance of strategically located India, the home of tremendous manpower and significant resources, was realized in that period of crisis. The Supreme American Commander, General Eisenhower for instance, held the view that "aside from preserving lines of air and sea communications to Australia, we had to hold the Indian bastion at all cost, otherwise junction between the Japanese and German forces would be accomplished through the Persian Gulf."²

Secondly, the British inability to maintain normal trade relations with India enabled the United States to expand immensely its economic connections with India.³ Thirdly, over a 100,000 American troops were stationed in India and their safety was causing concern to America.⁴

Fourthly, America seemed concerned about its political and military prestige in Asian and African countries after the war. Indian nationalism had presented a dilemma to the American Government and the public by demanding independence from Great Britain, America's most prized ally. To nationalists throughout Africa and Asia, the American response to the deadlock between the British and the Indian National Congress was being regarded as the critical test of the war aims of Allies.

²Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London, 1948), p. 28.

³Natarajan, *American Shadow Over India* (Bombay, 1952), p. 22.

⁴*Ibid.*

On 12 October 1941, Mahatma Gandhi issued his first direct appeal to the United States for assistance against the British. "She should withdraw any help unless there are guarantees of human liberties. If America is true to her tradition, she should say what Abraham Lincoln would say. America would lose nothing by making stipulations concerning her war help."⁵ Gandhi's sentiments were endorsed in the *Christian Century* and *Asia*. A *New York Times* editorial reflected substantial agreement to his viewpoint.⁶

American Pressure Over British Administration

"Before Pearl Harbour", writes Churchill, "India had been regarded (by the Americans) as a lamentable example of British responsibility."⁷ With the Japanese making threatening advance towards the Indian frontier, the United States Government began to offer advice to the British about Indian affairs. Initial concern was expressed briefly during Churchill's visit to Washington in December 1941 during which issues pertaining to military strategy, the formation of the United Nations and other matters were discussed with Roosevelt.

On one occasion during their meeting, Roosevelt raised the Indian question and made an attempt to persuade Churchill to adopt a more conciliatory view of Indian claims. He was fully convinced that the Indians would co-operate better with the British if they were assured of independence, at least after the war.⁸ But according to Churchill, "I reacted so strongly and at such length that he never raised it again."⁹ The respite was brief and Churchill's assumption that the American President would not venture again to raise the subject was belied.

⁵*New York Times*, 13 October 1941.

⁶*The Christian Century*, 29 October 1941, p. 1323; *Asia*, December 1941, pp. 662-3; *New York Times*, 24 November 1941. Cited in Gary R. Hess, *America Encounters India, 1941-1947* (Baltimore, 1971), p. 30.

⁷Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (Boston, 1950), pp. 308-9.

⁸*Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 1482. Also cited in Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942* (Delhi, 1958), pp. 19-20.

⁹Churchill, n. 7, p. 209.

The fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and the visit of Chiang Kai-shek to India focused the attention of the press, State Department and Senate Foreign Relations Committee on India. This led the President to raise the Indian question again with Churchill. The surrender of the supposedly impregnable naval base at Singapore left the remainder of Malaya, Burma and India vulnerable to Japanese conquest. Editorials in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Journal*, *American*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Examiner* and *San Francisco News* argued that a reorientation of British imperial policy towards India was necessary.¹⁰

On 17 February 1942, the Assistant Secretary of State of the United States, A.A. Berley Jr. (with the support of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs) drafted a memorandum putting forward proposals to the Churchill Government on the Indian situation.

The memorandum said:

It seems to me that the State Department must immediately get to work on the changed situation in the Far East arising out of the fall of Singapore. The first item on the list ought to be to tackle the Indian problem in a large way. . . . It would seem that the logical thing to do was to have Churchill announce in London that the British plans contemplated the introduction of India as a full partner in the United States.¹¹

The rapidly deteriorating military situation lent some urgency to the memorandum submitted by Berley. The point of view that he urged was reinforced by a telegraphic message of Chiang Kai-shek to Roosevelt, dated February 1942 through his Minister for Foreign Affairs, T.V. Soong, who was at that time in Washington. He had sent

¹⁰*The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 1942; *The New York Journal*, 13 February 1942; *American*, 13 February 1942; *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1942; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 17 February 1942; *San Francisco News*, 26 February 1942. Cited in Gary R. Hess, n. 6, p. 35.

¹¹Berley to Welles, 17 February 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers*, 1942 (Washington), Vol. 1, pp. 602-4. (Hereinafter referred to as *FRUS, DP*).

that message immediately after his visit to New Delhi. This was passed on to Roosevelt on 25 February 1942. In the message, he had asserted that the Indian political problem should be immediately and urgently solved and that if the British Government did not fundamentally change its policy toward India, it would be like presenting India to the enemy and inviting them to quickly occupy India."¹²

On the same day (25 February 1942) the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate also discussed Indian affairs. The Committee was impressed by the manpower of India as a source of military strength. Many members of the Committee made pointed queries to the State Department demanding to know what the policy of the administration was towards the situation in India. They asserted that the United States should "guide" Britain to accept the "thesis of Gandhi's political objectives". "The only way to get the people of India to fight was to get them to fight for India", they declared.¹³

The Assistant Secretary added an appraisal of the implications of the attitude of Foreign Relations Committee that was bound to make the Administration sit up and take notice. He warned that some Senators might use the Indian issue not for an attack on Britain but on the Roosevelt administration for its failure to use its authority to strengthen the military and manpower position of the United States in the Far East.¹⁴

The very day (25 February), evidently as a result of this report and Berley's memorandum, White House cabled Winant, the United States Ambassador in London suggesting that he or Averell Harriman, his special representative in London dealing with matters related to Lend-Lease for the British Empire, should send him "a slant on what the Prime Minister thinks about new relationship between Britain and India".¹⁵

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 604-5.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 606-7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

Harriman immediately saw Churchill. The American Embassy in London informed the Secretary of State in Washington on 26 February 1942 that Churchill was anxious to keep the President well 'posted with what the British Government was doing in regard to India.¹⁶

On 4 March 1942 Churchill informed Roosevelt that his government was earnestly considering whether a declaration that, at the end of the war, India would receive Dominion Status with the right to secede, should be made "at this critical juncture". But at the same time he believed his government must not on any account abandon its obligations to the Muslims, the untouchables, and the Princes of India.¹⁷

Labour Party Pressure

Churchill's communication to Roosevelt was as much a consequence of external considerations as of political pressures at home. On 19 December 1941 (thirteen days after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour), Clement Attlee presided over a War Cabinet meeting. The Minister of Labour and National Service, Ernest Bevin asked whether the British policy was "calculated to get the fullest war effort from India" and proposed an early discussion of the issue by the War Cabinet.¹⁸

When Churchill, who was in Washington read this, he cabled to the Deputy Prime Minister Attlee on 7 January 1942 of "the danger of raising constitutional issue, still more of making constitutional changes, in India at a moment when enemy is upon the frontier". "The idea", continued the cable, "that we should 'get more out of India' by putting the Congress in charge at this juncture seems ill-founded.... Bringing hostile political element into the defence will paralyse action."

Further, referring to the Indian Liberal's demand, the cable read:

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 608.

¹⁷*CM*, n. 1, pp. 309-10.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 14.

Merely picking and choosing friendly Indians will do no serious harm but will not in any way meet the political demands. The Indian liberals, though plausible, have never been able to deliver the goods. The Indian troops are fighting splendidly . . . the rule of the Congress and Hindoo Priesthood machine would never be tolerated by a fighting race. . . . I trust we shall not depart from the position we have deliberately taken up.¹⁹

Churchill's stand was supported by the Viceroy Linlithgow who advised Amery to "stand firm and make no further move" from the earlier position.²⁰ In another telegram on the same day (21 January 1942), he asked the Prime Minister also to adopt the same attitude towards India.²¹

The Secretary of State was in broad agreement with the Viceroy's policy of inactivity aimed at *status quo* and commended it to the War Cabinet as well as the Premier on 22 January 1942: "I entirely agree with him (Linlithgow) that there is nothing to be done at this moment with Sapru's proposals or with any suggestions of a fresh constitutional advance."²²

The British Labour Party's Views

Contrary to the conservatives, the British Labourites viewed the Indian situation from a different angle. They did not find any rationale behind the British policy of "lie back and not move" and that too, when the Indian hostility towards the British was gaining perpetual momentum to the advantage of the Axis powers. To the Labourites, it was a bad sign of a lurking catastrophe over the British empire and, therefore, they stood for a 'farsighted policy' towards India which could break the political impasse and reconcile Indian opinion in favour of the British war efforts against the Axis.

¹⁹Churchill to Attlee, 7 January 1942, *ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰Linlithgow to Amery, *ibid.*, pp. 45-50.

²¹Linlithgow to Churchill, *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

²²Secretary of State to Churchill, 22 January 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

On 2 February 1942, Attlee, in a memorandum, expressed his inability to accept the conclusions of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India that nothing could be done at the present moment. "I find it quite impossible to accept and act on the crude imperialism of the Viceroy, not only because I think it is wrong, but because I think it is fatally short-sighted and suicidal."²³

Attlee did not want political deadlock in India to continue any more and stood for some sort of diplomacy and acts of statesmanship for the purpose. In his memorandum he further expressed his view: "While I have little or no faith in the value of 'gestures', I do consider that—now is the time for an act of statesmanship. To mark time is to lose India."²⁴ Britain must invite the leaders of the Indian political parties. As Linlithgow was "not the man to do this . . . a representative with power to negotiate within wide limits should be sent to India now, either as a special envoy or in replacement of the present Viceroy, and . . . a Cabinet Committee should be appointed to draw up terms of reference and powers."²⁵

Churchill's Proposed Scheme

For the moment the War Cabinet shelved the proposal put forward by Attlee. Winston Churchill was not in favour of raising the issue of India in the Cabinet. He desired to meet the situation by issuing a scheme in the form of an appeal to the Indian people which he was to broadcast possibly on 15 February 1942.²⁶

According to this draft appeal which contained the provisions both concerning the post-war future and the interim present, no profound changes were to take place in the nature of the Government of India during the war period. However, it asked British India to unite and send its best and most representative men from every party,

²³Memorandum by Lord Privy Seal, 2 February 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 110-12. See also pp. 75-81.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 151.

group and provinces as well as the Princely States, with whom Britain was joined by Treaties, to serve it in its hour of peril and lay the foundations for a new future based on its complete freedom to control its own destiny within the British Commonwealth.

For this purpose the Government was to set up a representative Indian Council of Defence. It was to be elected (so far as British India was concerned) by the existing members of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures in such a manner as to enable every community to secure the same proportion in the Council of Defence as in the elective body. Representatives of the Indian States were also to be added to these British-Indian representatives in due proportion.

The main duty of this Council during the war was to advise the Government and help in war efforts throughout the country, particularly in the field of recruitment of personnel to the army, production of munitions and organization of air raid precautions. It was stipulated, that the Council would nominate a representative for inclusion in the Viceroy's Executive Council. This nominated representative would attend meetings of the British War Cabinet and the Pacific War Council. At the end of the war, the Council was to nominate again a representative, or representatives to the peace conference.

After the war, the Council was to work out a new constitution for India without any delay which was to be approved by His Majesty's Government.²⁷

On 13 February 1942 the Secretary of State, commended the Prime Minister's scheme to the Viceroy and pointed out that it left untouched the executive and legislative position of Government of India. Explaining details of the scheme for an Indian Council of Defence and elaborating its advantages, he sought the Viceroy's reactions. He emphasized to the Viceroy that such a plan provided a step for the eventual solution of the constitutional problem on lines which the Congress could not denounce as undemocratic and which "can be commended to Muslims and Princes as maintaining our 1940 pledges".

²⁷Amery to Linlithgow, 13 February 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

The Secretary of States hoped that the scheme would be generally acceptable at a time when danger to India itself was so obvious. And, if it was so, "you will be able to carry on with your Executive Council" possibly expanded, and with a larger and perhaps better consultative body which might also be more effective in promoting the war effort throughout the provinces. "If, on the other hand, the appeal fails, and if the offer is rejected, the public here in America, in China and in a large measure even in India will realize at last that the real difficulty lies in the unreasonableness of Indian politicians and the incompatibility of their respective domestic policies."²⁸

The Viceroy's chief objection to the Churchill plan was that the "new Council would soon acquire real power" which would prove more than embarrassing to government; that it would precipitate the whole constitutional and communal controversy into the conduct of the war and the day-to-day government. "Worse still", he was convinced "it might precipitate a dangerous communal reaction in the forces themselves" and infect the army "with communal fever of the most catastrophic kinds".²⁹

On 25 February 1942, he transmitted to the Secretary of States his alternative suggestions to Churchill's broadcast. Since he was not inclined to see his Government's authority and power weakened and shared by the Indian representatives, he did not favour Churchill's scheme for the creation of an advisory Indian Council of Defence.

India's representatives in the War Cabinet, the Pacific War Council (as against the Churchill scheme) as well as at the Peace Conference were to be nominated by the Government of India. His Majesty's Government was to stand by Her pledges to the formation of a body representing the various parties, communities and interests of India.

This body was to be provided the fullest opportunity to devise the framework of a constitution after the war. The Viceroy's scheme concluded that such a constitution

²⁸Amery to Linlithgow, 13 February 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 159-61.

²⁹Linlithgow to Amery, 16 February 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 177-81.

“representing the will and desire of India as a whole” could be accepted even in advance.³⁰

Due weight was to be given to the views of Lord Linlithgow and the proposed broadcast was deferred. In the meanwhile, the British House of Commons was discussing and debating the war situation. Contrary to the views held by the Viceroy, the Secretary of State and the Premier, on 24 and 25 February 1942, fifteen speakers made references to the lingering Indian problem and with the exception of one, all of them advocated the urgency of forming a national government in India. In his reply, Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal assured the House that the “government was as much concerned as was everybody else”.³¹

The War Cabinet Decides to Send Cripps Mission

On 26 February 1942, Churchill set up a special India Committee of the War Cabinet to draft and prepare a fresh constitutional statement for India. Its chairman was Attlee and its other members were Churchill (who had become a regular non-attender), Amery, Cripps, Sir John Anderson, Lord Simon and Sir James Grigg.³²

In view of the Viceroy’s criticism of the Churchill’s proposed scheme, envisaging for the interim present, the setting up of an advisory body, which was also to be the future constitution-framing body, the Committee decided to abandon that original scheme and in its third meeting, held on 28 February 1942, formulated a new Declaration.

The Declaration consisted of two parts: one relating to the future of India both as regards procedure for arriving at the new constitution and as regards its future status and the other concerning its immediate present. The principal new features of this declaration were:

- (i) explicit acknowledgement that the future Indian

³⁰Linlithgow to Amery, 25 February 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 243-6.

³¹*House of Commons Debate*, s. 5, col. 257, cited in Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942* (Delhi, 1958), p. 21.

³²Attlee and Cripps (who had joined the War Cabinet on 19 February as Lord Privy Seal) were the only Labourites in the Committee. Sir John Anderson was the Lord President of the Council. Viscount Simon was Lord Chancellor and Sir James Grigg was Secretary of State for war.

Dominion could secede from the Commonwealth if it so wished;

- (ii) setting up of a suitable future constitution-making body just after the war if Indians had not previously come to an agreement on the subject themselves;
- (iii) option to any province not wishing to accede to the new constitution to stand out with a right to be dealt with by the British Government by a separate treaty to be concluded with the constitution-making body, and to come into force simultaneously with the new constitution.

Immediately after the war, an elected body was to be set up in India with the power to formulate a new constitution for it and His Majesty's Government had to accept and implement that constitution subject to—

- (i) the right of any province of British India that was not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for subsequent accession or for other arrangements for their separate political status, in the case of non-acceding provinces;
- (ii) the signing of a treaty to be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body covering all necessary matters relating to the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; and
- (iii) the adjustment of treaty arrangements with the Indian States so far as they did not exercise their choice to adhere to the new union.

Regarding the composition of the Constitution-making body, elections were to be held in the provinces soon after the end of war, and after the results were known, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures was to proceed to the election of the Constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. The strength of this new body was to be about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college. Indian States were also to be invited to send their representatives, in the same proportion of the total population as the average for British India.

For the present, the Declaration in paragraph (e) did not make any improvement over the existing system and explicitly made it clear, that during the prevailing critical period and until the new constitution could be formed, "His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the full responsibility for India's defence". The Declaration ended with an invitation to Indian leaders to participate in the counsels of their nation "to give their active vital help in the charge of that task".³³

On the same day, i.e. 28 February, as agreed to by the Indian Committee, the Secretary of State sent to the Viceroy the new agreed draft Declaration, for his comments. The Viceroy's initial reaction was that the form of the new draft had 'great advantages' as it left intact the pledges and assurances of the Declaration of August 1940, it contained clear promises for the future without making any specific commitments, such as the replacement during the war of an Executive Council of selected and representative individuals by one of the purely political complexion. But he did not commend the idea of 'local option' as that was almost certain to produce protests from the Bengal and Punjab Hindus, from the Sikhs and probably also from the Bengal Muslims. Nevertheless he was prepared to take the risk for the sake of a precise and brief declaration which did not tie his hands in advance regarding the immediate future of the Executive Council. He was of the opinion that Indian States should also have free choice to adhere or not to adhere to the union.³⁴

Minor amendments in the wording of the draft Declaration as proposed by the Secretary of State were made by the Committee on India on 2 March 1942.³⁵ However, they did not bring any fundamental and basic change in the content, spirit and form of the declaration. It was this draft Declaration which Sir Stafford Cripps carried with him to India.

³³War Cabinet Committee on India, mtg 3, 28 February 1942, CM, pp. 266-7.

³⁴Linlithgow to Amery, 2 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 284-7.

³⁵War Cabinet Committee on India, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, 1 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 274. See also pp. 276-7 and 280-2.

On 3 March 1942 the War Cabinet had a preliminary discussion on the proposed Declaration and asked the India Committee whether the last paragraph of the draft Declaration dealing with the immediate present “should be made more explicit, and if not, what answer should be given when we are asked in what way we hoped that the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people would participate in the counsels of their country”.³⁶ The same day, the Committee on India gave further consideration to the text of the draft Declaration.

It was the general consensus within the Committee that major constitutional changes were impossible during the war and that the supremacy of His Majesty’s Government over the Government of India through the Viceroy was not in question. However, there was no agreement over the exact limits to the participation that the paragraph envisaged. Sir Stafford Cripps later claimed that the matter was “purposely left vague”.³⁷

The Committee replied to the War Cabinet that the point raised should be met by instructions to the Viceroy. For this purpose, the Committee approved the following draft which Cripps himself had prepared:

You are authorised to negotiate with the leaders of the principal sections of Indian opinion, upon the basis of paragraph (e) of the Declaration, for the purpose of obtaining their immediate support for some scheme by which they can partake in an advisory or consultative manner in the counsels of their country.

This does not preclude your offering them—if you consider it wise or necessary—positions in your executive council, provided this does not embarrass you in the defence and good government of the country during the present critical time.³⁸

Considering whether any amendment should be made to the Declaration to deal with the position of the depressed

³⁶ War Cabinet, conclusions 27, 3 March 1942, *CM*, pp. 303-4.

³⁷ Cripps to Churchill, 4 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 637.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

classes and small minorities as was asked by the Viceroy on 2 March,³⁹ the Committee felt that they should be dealt with in the explanatory speeches. In the same meeting, the Committee also recommended to the Prime Minister to use words in its introductory passage which would convey a sense of finality while reading the Declaration in the House of Commons and broadcasting to India.

On 4 March 1942, Churchill informed the American President that a Declaration of Dominion Status for India after the war was under consideration, but at the same time mentioned the difficulties involved in it. These, he explained:

We must not on any account break with the Moslems who represent a hundred million people and the main army elements on which we must rely for the immediate fighting. We have also to consider our duty towards thirty to forty million untouchables and our treaties with the Princely States, perhaps, eighty millions. Naturally, we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of invasion. . . . I will keep you informed.⁴⁰

The Viceroy, whose initial response to the draft Declaration was favourable, consulted the Commander-in-Chief and obtained the views of the Provincial Governors. In the light of their reactions and his own study of the draft Declaration, he felt himself bound to re-define his position.

The Commander-in-Chief, Lord Wavell, thought that the general effect of the contemplated announcement would be disastrous on fighting forces and did not find the time (when things were going wrong) opportune for such an announcement. He was quite certain that the contemplated announcement would take the mind of the soldiers off fighting the enemies sooner or later.

The Declaration of 'local option' which was to meet adequately the case of Muslims in the Provinces in which they were in the majority, was no substitute for existing pledges in the eyes of the Muslims elsewhere, or for the other minorities such as the Sikhs, scheduled castes and

³⁹Linlithgow to Amery, *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁴⁰Churchill to Roosevelt, 4 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

backward communities. As such, it would have given birth to dangerous communal strife.

“Local option”, it was argued, would be interpreted as the acceptance of Pakistan and the effect would be particularly bad on the Punjab. The prospect of a predominantly Muslim and independent Punjab would seriously upset the Sikhs.⁴¹ The Viceroy, taking cognizance of the views of his civilian and military colleagues requested Churchill to incorporate pledges to minorities in the Declaration.⁴²

On 7 March 1942, the War Cabinet invited the Committee on India to further revise the draft Declaration in the light of the views of the Secretary of State for India, the Viceroy and Wavell. Nehru’s speech, that nothing short of a National Government would satisfy the Congress, as reported in that morning’s newspapers, was also taken into account.⁴³

The same day at 3 p.m. the India Committee held its meeting and further revised the draft Declaration. This revision was nothing more than altering its words. Amery had disliked the phrase making an explicit acknowledgement that the future Indian Dominion could secede if it so wished. To placate Amery it was deleted from the preamble of the draft Declaration but as a gesture to Congress and Nehru’s recent statement it was added in the later part of the Declaration.

While referring to the signing of a treaty which was to be negotiated between His Majesty’s Government and the constitution-making body, the revised draft Declaration retained the spirit of the deleted phrase in maintaining that His Majesty’s Government “will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth”.

The Committee, however, did not accede to the views of the Viceroy and so the provision for ‘local option’ still remained in the draft Declaration. Neither did it accept his

⁴¹Linlithgow to Amery, 6 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 328-9.

⁴²Linlithgow to Churchill, 6 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 329.

⁴³War Cabinet W.M. (42), conclusions 30, 7 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 353. ➤

plea for the incorporation of pledges to the minorities in the Declaration and the revised draft Declaration was submitted to the War Cabinet by Attlee the very day for its further consideration.

On 9 March 1942 the War Cabinet, while approving the revised draft Declaration, considered timing of its issue. The Prime Minister did not like the idea of the immediate issue of the Declaration without sounding public opinion in India because of the fear that the Congress might reject the Declaration and that might give rise to division of opinion in England. "In the circumstances, he thought that the right course was to accept the very generous offer made by the Lord Privy Seal to visit India and discuss matters with the leaders of the main Indian political parties."

The War Cabinet felt deeply indebted to the Lord Privy Seal for his offer and noted that Cripps was taking out a specific scheme, otherwise "it would be said that he was going out to negotiate". He was to take with him the draft Declaration as the plan which he was to discuss with the leaders of Indian opinion.⁴⁴

Finally, the War Cabinet agreed that the draft instructions which the India Committee had approved on 3 March for implementing paragraph (e) of the draft Declaration should become an operative clause therein and the following sentence was added in the para: "In relation to this matter you will, no doubt, consult with the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, and will bear in mind the supreme importance of the military situation."⁴⁵

In the meanwhile, the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that the amendments to the draft Declaration did not meet either objections *vis-a-vis* the local option or those of his as well as the Commander-in-Chief.⁴⁶ In a separate communication to the Secretary of State the same day, he suggested an alternative draft Declaration which followed generally

⁴⁴War Cabinet, W.M.(42), conclusions 31, 9 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp.378-9.

⁴⁵War Cabinet Committee on India, mtg 8, 9 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 379-80. See also War Cabinet Committee on India, mtg 5, 3 March 1942, n. 43.

⁴⁶Linlithgow to Amery, 7 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 363.

the lines of the India Committee's draft but omitted the reference to local option and instead placed the responsibility on the constitution-making body to produce a constitution acceptable to the various Indian parties and interests.⁴⁷

In fact, he was so vehemently opposed to the proposed Declaration that he intimated to the Secretary of State that in case the declaration did not incorporate his amendments, he would resign on this issue.⁴⁸

The Premier, however, requested the Viceroy not to resign at that critical juncture. In his communication he emphasized the point that the Declaration was not to be published at the moment and that Stafford Cripps was being sent out to see whether the Declaration "could be put across on the spot".⁴⁹

The Secretary of State, reiterating the Premier's request, apprised him of the factors which had led to the breakthrough in the British policy of "lie back and not move". "The pressure outside", ran the communication, "upon Winston from Roosevelt and upon Attlee & Co. from his own party, plus the admission of Cripps to the War Cabinet, suddenly opened the sluice gates, and the thing moved with a rush."⁵⁰ The same day, 10 March 1942, he cabled to him stating that Cripps would be "going out not on a roving mission but with the plan embodied in the draft Declaration as his general instructions".⁵¹

On 11 March 1942, Churchill announced the Cabinet's decision to send Sir Stafford Cripps to India in both the Houses.⁵²

It was welcomed by both the Conservatives and the Labourites. Some of them, however, felt that this move of the British government to break the Indian constitutional impasse was a belated one (The *Economist*, 14 March,

⁴⁷Linlithgow to Amery, 9 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴⁸Linlithgow to Amery, 9 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 385.

⁴⁹Churchill to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 394.

⁵⁰Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 401-04.

⁵¹Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 395-6.

⁵²Parliamentary Debates, Series 5, House of Commons, Vol. 378, 11, March 1942, cols. 1069-70. See also *CM*, Amery to Linlithgow, 11 March 1942, pp. 406-8.

1942). The *Times* (13 March, 1942) regarded the Prime Minister's announcement as "one of those decisions whose boldness strikes the imagination. It imparts a breath of fresh life and hope to an issue which had begun to seem well nigh desperate."

While the *New Leader* in its editorial dated 21st March, 1942 called the decision of the government to send Cripps to India as the wisest step, in its issue of 4th April, 1942, it evaluated the Cripps proposals as "unsatisfactory".

The *Manchester Guardian* in its issue of 30th March, 1942 criticized the Cripps offer for its non-accession provision and decried "such a breach in Indian unity".

In India the announcement led to speculations in the political quarters as nobody knew what the British Government had exactly proposed. By and large, all the political parties and groups reserved their comments but welcomed the decision of the British Government.⁵³

In sum, Attlee's scheme of sending an envoy to India for the purpose of breaking the political impasse, thereby seeking the co-operation of the whole country in British

⁵³ Within an hour of the announcement, the press in India wanted to know the comments of the President of All-India National Congress, Abul Kalam Azad. He replied, "I cannot give a reply without carefully examining what are the exact terms of the offer which Sir Stafford Cripps is bringing. I would, however, welcome him as an old friend and try to meet his views as far as possible." [Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Orient Longmans, 1959), p. 48].

While Mahatma Gandhi declined to make any comment Rajagopalachari was happy that the British had at last realized the gravity of the situation and had chosen to send a good ambassador.

Sapru commented: "On the whole I welcome Cripps' forthcoming visit and would not like to say a word which might prejudice his great mission in which I hope he will achieve as much success as he has in Russia. In view of increasing danger to India delay is regrettable, but it is as well that a man of Sir Stafford's status of independence of mind and democratic antecedents should visit India and see things with his own eyes." (*C.M.* pp. 413-14)

Jinnah refused to give his opinion as he was anticipating the decision of the Muslim League Working Committee meeting which was to be called as soon as possible to consider situation and announcement. (*Ibid*)

Savarkar, on behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha, wished to welcome Cripps but regretted that the scheme itself should have been still a "cat in the bag". (*Ibid*).

war efforts had thus borne fruit and an attempt was made by Churchill to placate the American opinion, particularly that of the President who had persistently asked him to adopt a more reconciliatory attitude to the Indian question. Whether the "lie back" policy was given up or not needs to be seen in the aftermath of the Cripps proposals.

3

Negotiations

On 23 March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps along with F.F. Turnball of the India House (Private Secretary to the Secretary of the State for India) and his Secretaries, A.D.K. Owen and Graham Spray, arrived in Delhi with the British War Cabinet Declaration and also with a brief, which he had written himself, to “negotiate with the leaders of the principal sections of Indian opinion . . . some scheme” for their participation “in an advisory or consultative manner in the counsels of their country”.

Negotiations started on 25 March 1942 and passed through various delicate and crucial phases, at times “arising high hopes to be dashed down ultimately”¹ on 10 April 1942. The first few days of the mission were its brightest days in India. Thereafter it became a running battle by Cripps to save his scheme from suffering complete wreckage.

Discord between Cripps and the Viceroy

Immediately after his arrival, Cripps went to the Viceroy’s House and stayed with him as his guest for two days. Keeping in mind the India Committee’s injunction, he thought it imperative to consult Linlithgow before embarking upon any scheme of negotiations and discussions with the Indian political leaders.

Cripps showed the Viceroy a list of the new Executive, wholly Indian, except for the Commander-in-Chief, which

¹Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942* (Delhi, 1948), p. 22.

he himself had prepared. The list did not meet the Viceroy's approval. As before, the Viceroy was opposed to the transfer of power to Indian hands and he maintained his objection that the proposed Council would seriously undermine his authority and position in the Council. "That's my affair", he strongly reacted and held that "the implementation of the paragraph (e)" of the draft Declaration "should be done by him as Governor-General".²

The Viceroy's reaction had valid ground. Sir Stafford was supposed to have consulted him before taking any decision or stand on India's participation in the Viceroy's Executive Council aimed at solving the immediate problem of securing its full co-operation in the British war effort. The clear-cut impression which he had gathered until then from the Secretary of State for India was that any interpretation of paragraph (e) of the draft Declaration by Sir Stafford and thereby its implementation was to be discussed with him in his Viceregal capacity.³

Sir Stafford agreed to Linlithgow's contention but maintained that "the ultimate responsibility lay with the War Cabinet but if it was merely a question of collecting the right personnel in India that was obviously a matter for him".⁴ The discussion of Cripps' plan of a reconstituted Executive Council was, thus, deferred at this stage.

On 24 March 1942, Sir Stafford had a meeting with the Viceroy and his Executive Council which was very anxious to see the draft proposals. Though he expressed his inability to disclose the plan at that early stage, as had been the instructions from the War Cabinet itself, he read the Declaration slowly and was asked to read clause (e)

²H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (London, 1969), p. 98.

See also Note by Cripps, 23 March 1942, p. 462 in N. Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of power 1942-47: The Cripps Mission, January-April* (London, 1971), Vol. 1. (Hereinafter referred to as *CM*).

³See Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, *CM*, p. 396; Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 399; Amery to Linlithgow, 12 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴Note by Sir Stafford Cripps, 23 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 462.

again—the clause which related to the arrangements during the war period. Replying to the questions, he told the Executive Council that the participation of Indians in the Council would be welcome, save defence, “to any extent that His Excellency desired”.⁵

Soon after, the Viceroy cabled to the Secretary of State for India to check the point with him.⁶ His reply was that the “War Cabinet are uncommitted on this issue though it was clear from discussions that they would be “prepared for positions on Executive Council to be offered to political leaders provided this would not embarrass the defence and good government of the War”.⁷

Beginning of the Negotiations

On 25 March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps moved to 3 Queen Victoria Road (now Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road) where he met the Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and later Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the President of the All India Muslim League, the same day. To both of them, he gave copies of his Draft Declaration and explained orally their significance.

This was the beginning of the negotiations between Cripps and the prominent leaders of the Indian political parties. Maulana Azad and Nehru represented the Congress, though other members of the Congress Working Committee had also met Cripps. Mahatma Gandhi participated in the discussions in his personal capacity as he did not hold any official position in the Congress and that was also because Sir Stafford had expressed his wish to see him.

Jinnah came as the sole representative of the Muslim League but Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and Fazl-ul-Haq, Prime Ministers of Punjab and Bengal respectively, were also interviewed. The Jam Sahib of Nawanagar and the Maharajah of Bikaner, the Chancellor and the pro-Chan-

⁵Notes on Executive Council Meeting, 24 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 477.

⁶Linlithgow to Amery, 25 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 478.

⁷Amery to Linlithgow, 25 March 1942, *ibid.*, p. 481.

cellor of the Chamber of Princes represented the rulers of the Indian States.

Others who took part in the discussions with Cripps were Savarkar and other members of the Hindu Mahasabha, Ambedkar and M.C. Rajah (Depressed Classes), Sapru and Jayakar (Liberals) and representatives of the Sikhs, the Indian Christians, the Anglo-Indians and the Europeans.

As was expected in the light of past experiences, the negotiations were essentially carried on with the Congress, the Muslim League appeared to be satisfied with the draft scheme as a whole but stood by and awaited the Congress verdict on the Draft Declaration.

The Congress was opposed to the long-term provisions, enabling the Muslim majority provinces and the princely States to opt out of the post-war union of India. These provisions were to be regarded as final by and large.

This left open for discussion the proposed war-time changes incorporated in paragraph (e) of the Declaration, such as the question of the character as well as the status of the Executive Council and especially of its Defence Member.

Cripps Promises an Indian Cabinet

In his first meeting of 25 March 1942 with the Congress President Maulana Azad, Cripps noted the Maulana's critical response on clause (e) of the Draft Declaration. The Congress President wanted that Indians should be given the control of the defence of their country. Objecting to it, Cripps stressed the need for retaining control of Indian defence in British hands in a situation when India had strategically become a part of a much greater theatre of war. He maintained that if India wanted to participate in the war, it could do so by appointing its representative to the British War Cabinet.

Azad reiterated his views as regards mobilizing defensive power in India and advocated Indianization of the Defence Ministry but not at the cost of interfering with the Commander-in-Chief in matters of war strategy. How-

ever, this was Maulana Azad's personal view who was to report the plan to the Congress Working Committee.⁸

Commenting on the outcome of the meeting, Azad maintained that it ended on a note of optimism. He records the discussion: "The net result of the proposal was that in place of the majority of British Members in the existing Executive Council, there would be an Executive Council composed of Indians alone." When asked what would be the position of the Viceroy in this Council, Cripps had replied that the Viceroy would function as a constitutional head like the King in the United Kingdom and would be bound by the advice of the Council.⁹

Jinnah's initial Reaction to the Draft Declaration

The same day (25 March) Jinnah also had a meeting with Cripps and after going through the Draft Declaration, he appeared satisfied contrary to Maulana Azad's initial reaction. He found his demand for a separate nation for the Muslims being fulfilled which he had clearly read in between the lines of the draft. But yet he wanted an explicit promise of Pakistan.

On the issue of the Executive Council Jinnah reiterated the view held by Maulana Azad. However, asked for his opinion on the operation of paragraph (e), he did not find any insuperable difficulty, provided the Viceroy would consult the Congress and the League on the composition of the Executive and treat the Council as a Cabinet rather than as the Executive Council. Like the Congress representative Jinnah also said that he did not speak for the League on the proposals and promised to lay the matter before his Working Committee.

The Viceroy Appraised

On the night of 25 March, Cripps had a discussion with the Viceroy and acquainted him with the talks which he

⁸Interview with Maulana Azad and Asaf Ali, 25 March 1942, *CM*, p. 479.

⁹Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 49.

¹⁰Interview with Jinnah, 25 March 1942, *CM*, pp. 480-1.

had with the two Indian leaders. Lord Linlithgow drew his attention to his telegrams of February and early March sent both to the Secretary of State for India and the Cabinet on the question of the Executive Council. In these telegrams, he had set forth the maximum concessions that he would make in order to secure Indian co-operation.

While he was prepared to invite the Indian leaders to join his Executive Council, he would not promise the removal of all official members as a "pre-requisite of a political truce".¹¹ However, he would discuss the matter "as a practical problem of administration with such leaders as may emerge as likely to be those from among whom his future colleagues in a National Government will be drawn".

The Viceroy had in his mind the heavy administrative burden that he would need to bear if he lost official advice in the Home and Finance Departments. Still, his cables expressed a desire "to recognize without delay the *de facto* status of India under a National Government".¹²

Lord Linlithgow now said that if Cripps secured the assent of both the Indian parties, Congress and the League to the Declaration, and if both agreed to co-operate then he "was prepared to take big risks. . . . If Sir Stafford could do the big thing he would not find His Excellency falling short."¹³ Sir Stafford accepted the reasonableness of the Viceroy's conditions.

State's Representatives meet Cripps

In their meeting with Cripps on 26 March, the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar and the Maharajah of Bikaner, representing the Chamber of Princes, seemed satisfied with the Declaration because, though it had allowed them the option to come into the constitution-making body, it had also given them the option to go out if they did not agree with the constitution as formulated. They, however, wished

¹¹Linlithgow to Amery, 25 February 1942, *ibid.*, p. 245.

¹²*Ibid.* See also Linlithgow's reference to "National Government" on 8 March 1942, in a cable to Amery, *ibid.*, p. 369.

¹³Memorandum of Cripps-Linlithgow Conversation, night of 25 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 484-5.

to present the document before the Chamber of Princes and intended to see Cripps later again.¹⁴

Attitude of Other Minorities

On 27 March 1942 Sir Stafford had separate interviews with the Sikh representatives and a number of Europeans. He elaborated the clauses of the Draft to the Sikh representatives one by one, especially the clause relating to the protection of the Sikh minority and they took the document to consult their committee.¹⁵ Cripps also had discussions with a group of Europeans on the subject.¹⁶

Mahatma Gandhi on the Draft

The same day (27 March 1942) Cripps had a meeting with Mahatma Gandhi and explained to him the idea behind the proposed Declaration. Mahatma's spontaneous reaction was very strong. In the discussion he expressed firm opposition to the form, content and spirit of the proposals. He told Cripps that though he did not represent Congress officially which was also not necessarily bound to abide by his views, the Draft was likely to be rejected by the Congress in protest against two main points of the Declaration. First, the paragraph dealing with the Indian States, and second, the one dealing with accession or non-accession of provinces. He also questioned the retention of Defence in British hands.

Mahatma Gandhi stressed the point that Congress "could not tolerate the continuance of those autocratic States under the aegis of the British Government with the right to call upon the British armed forces to enforce the arbitrary power of their rulers" and complained that the scheme "envisaged the continuance in perpetuity of such a regime in the case of those States that did not actually come into the new Indian Union".

He wanted the immediate conversion of all the States into independent States "having no reliance upon the para-

¹⁴Note by Stafford Cripps, Interview with the Jam Sahib and the Maharaja of Bikaner, 26 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 487.

¹⁵Note by Cripps, Interview with a number of Sikhs, 27 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 496-8.

¹⁶Interview with a number of Europeans, *ibid.*, pp. 501-2.

mountcy of the British Government", which was in his opinion, bound to "acclerate a movement for power by the States' peoples". As regards the second point, he told Sir Stafford that his document was clearly an open invitation to the Muslims to create a Pakistan and questioned his wisdom of coming to India with such a cut and dried scheme to be imposed upon the Indians.¹⁷

On 28 March again, several Indian leaders including a delegation of Chamber of Princes, Sapru and Jayakar, C. Rajagopalachari, Jinnah, the representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha and Maulana Azad met Cripps. Both Sapru and Jayakar pleaded for Indian control over Defence, in reply to which Cripps gave the same arguments which he had given to Maulana Azad earlier. C. Rajagopalachari also advocated the Indianization of the Defence service if the agreement of the Congress to the Draft was sought.¹⁸

Jinnah gave the impression that his Committee had accepted the scheme in principle and was prepared to proceed to settle the details especially those under clause (e). In reply to this, Cripps told Jinnah that, if the League and the Congress accepted the Declaration he would "ask the Viceroy to get in touch with them as regards the questions of formation of a Government under clause (e)".¹⁹

Maulana Azad's meeting with Cripps was crucial for the success of the scheme as he had come to raise further explanatory points with him on the same old issues of the right of non-accession and handling of Defence, prior to the meeting of the Congress Working Committee which was to meet the next day, 29 March. Differences continued on Defence question; the accession issue was not discussed as it was considered to be not so important for the present, and Maulana Azad went back unsatisfied.²⁰

The Declaration Made Public

On 29 March 1942, Cripps held a Press Conference in one

¹⁷Note by Sir Cripps, Interview with Mahatma Gandhi, 27 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 498-500.

¹⁸Interview with C. Rajagopalachari, *ibid.*, pp. 511-12.

¹⁹Interview with Jinnah, 28 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 512-13.

²⁰Interview with the Congress President, 28 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 514-15.

of the spacious Chambers of the Secretariat which was attended by a gathering of about 200 newsmen. It was at this conference that he released the Draft to the Press. The object of His Majesty's Government was stated to be "the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect and in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs".²¹

The Draft, which Cripps released to the Press, consisted of a Preamble and five clauses, the first four essentially dealing with the future after the cessation of hostilities, and the final clause (e) inviting the Indian co-operation at the present juncture.

The first four clauses dealt with the manner in which the future Indian Union was to be brought into being. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, an elected body was to be set up to frame a constitution for India. "Unless the leaders of opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of the hostilities", the constitution-making body was to be elected on the basis of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Assemblies, organized under the 1935 Act, the additional appointments being made by the Princes in proportion to the population in their states.

The constitution framed by this body was to be accepted by His Majesty's Government, subject to two conditions.

First, any province of British India could refuse to accede to the proposed Union and become a Dominion on its own with "the same status" as the Indian Union. The princely states were also free to state their option in this respect. With such non-acceding provinces, His Majesty's Government declared its willingness to agree, if they so desired, to form a new constitution arrived at by an analogous procedure.

Secondly, a treaty was to be signed between this constitution-making body and His Majesty's Government to

²¹For full text of the Draft Declaration see Appendix I.

make provisions for the latter's pledges to protect minorities and other matters arising out of the transfer responsibility to Indian hands. The treaty, however, was not to "impose any restrictions on the power of the Indian Union to decide in future its relationship to other Member-States or the British Commonwealth".

The second part of the Draft i.e. clause (e) concerned the immediate and interim arrangements during the period of war. It did not envisage any change in the Constitution of 1935 nor in the responsibility of His Majesty's Government for the Government of India, and the control and direction of the defence of India. But it maintained that the task of organising the military, moral and material resources of India was the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of people of India and therefore, with this purpose invited the participation of Indian leaders to the counsels of their country, the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

Replying to a host of questions by newsmen, Cripps threw light on various points of the Draft. With reference to the positions of the Indian States, he maintained that they could not be forced to participate in the Constituent Assembly, or be compelled to choose their representatives in any particular manner. "We have not the same control over the Indian States as we have over British India",²² he explained.

Regarding Defence, he maintained that responsibility for and the control and direction of the defence of India during the interim war period could not be transferred to the Indians from the British hands. "It would be dishonest to say that an Indian Defence Member would be responsible for the defence of India,"²³ he added.

On the working of the new Executive Council under the proposed interim scheme Cripps said:

The object of the scheme is to give the fullest measure of government to the Indian people at the present time consistent with the possibilities of a constitution which

²²Proceedings of Press Conference, 29 March 1942, *CM*, p. 544.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 550.

cannot be changed until the end of the war. . . . All you can do is to change the Conventions of the Constitution. You can turn the Executive Council into a Cabinet.²⁴

The Draft Declaration, as Cripps himself had said, did not represent and envisage any drastic change in British policy towards India. "It would", held R. Coupland, "Indeed be altogether unfair to the British Government and particularly to Mr. Amery and Linlithgow to suggest that, under Sir Stafford's influence perhaps Indian policy had suddenly been diverted from a reactionary to a liberal course. In basic principle, the Draft Declaration was entirely in accord with the "August Offer" of 1940 which had promised Dominion Status to India after the war and had declared that the framing of the new constitution was primarily an Indian responsibility".²⁵

The advances, which it had made on the "August Offer" such as the elucidation of the meaning of Dominion Status and making Indians solely, not primarily, responsible for making their Constitution by that so-called practical method as proposed by the Draft and a method by which the chief obstacles to agreement were to be overcome, were minor improvements of little significance as in spirit they meant a continuation of the central theme of the old British imperialist policy.

On 30 March 1942 Jawaharlal Nehru held a meeting with Cripps. Though he was "conscious of the acute dangers that would arise if the Indian leaders were not to participate at the present time in the rallying of India to her own defence", he gave Cripps the impression that the Congress Working Committee would not accept the proposals.²⁶ The same day, in a broadcast over the All India Radio, Cripps appealed to the Indian people, to accept the Draft proposals. "It is with the greatest hopes", he said, "that I took to the events of the next few days which may

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 547.

²⁵R. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission* (London, 1942), p. 30.

²⁶Interview with Jawaharlal Nehru, 30 March 1942, *CM*. pp. 557-8.

if wisely handled seal for ever your freedom and our friendship".²⁷

Congress Working Committee's Discussion

The Committee, which had been in session since 29 March discussing the draft proposals, did not take any final decision till 31 March. The basic issue at stake was the powers of the Executive Council. Though, Sir Stafford had verbally assured Maulana Azad in his first meeting with him that the Viceroy's position would be that of a constitutional head in the Indianized Executive Council, the Working Committee desired and stipulated for a clear inclusion of this point into the terms of the agreement itself.²⁸

From the very first day of the meeting Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to any idea, suggesting the acceptance of the proposals which was, in Azad's opinion, "due more to his aversion to war than to his objection to the proposals as such".²⁹ While the other members of the Working Committee were looking towards Gandhiji for a lead, Nehru, who was troubled by Axis victories in Europe and Asia, advocated a sympathetic and favourable treatment of the Draft.

Cripps Changes Stand

On 1 April 1942, Maulana Azad had a meeting with Cripps and sought further clarification and more detailed information on issues like the composition and powers of the Executive Council. This meeting was a decisive one as Maulana Azad had to inform his Working Committee the outcome of his talk. He now found Cripps shifting his earlier stand on the issue of the status of the Executive Council by maintaining that the Council was subservient to the Viceroy. "This was not the impression which I had carried away from the first interview."³⁰

The next morning, Maulana Azad presented a completely new picture to Working Committee. He told the Committee

²⁷Broadcast by Sir Stafford Cripps, 30 March 1942. *ibid.*, pp. 566-71.

²⁸A. K. Azad, n. 9, p. 51.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 51.

that (i) the British Cabinet was not prepared to transfer power to India during the war as there was risk involved; (ii) in law, the Council was to remain as a Council only and not a Cabinet, (iii) the Council would remain subordinate to the Viceroy and the final responsibility would rest on him and not on the Council, (iv) the answer to the basic question raised by the Working Committee as to who would take the ultimate decision he said that it would be the Viceroy, and (v) finally, it could not be said with any certainty that India would become independent with the cessation of hostilities.³¹

Congress on Interim Arrangements

After a thorough discussion, the Working Committee adopted a resolution the same day (2 April) rejecting the Cripps offer.³² The Congress President and Jawaharlal Nehru met Cripps and gave him the Congress resolution. When asked about the finality of the rejection of the Draft, they told him that, though this was the considered opinion of the Congress Working Committee, it might reconsider its attitude if any change was brought in the existing document.³³ As agreed, the resolution was not published and they decided to proceed instead with their negotiations on the interim proposals.

In order to concentrate on the immediate issues, the Congress put aside the discussion of the main scheme relating to the future, though it had vehemently opposed that part of the Draft. Naturally, the negotiations between the two, Congress and the British, centered round the clause (e) of the Declaration, with special emphasis on the position of defence.

The Question of Defence Membership

The Working Committee had realized the extraordinary importance of the Defence Ministry in war time, both from the administrative as well as psychological points of view.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

³²V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1957), p. 125.

³³Interview with Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 April 1942, CM, p. 609.

The entire country desired to play its role in winning the war but that required an atmosphere where people could feel that they were fighting a people's war. The Committee was convinced that only with an Indian in charge of the defence of the country could this feeling be evoked and therefore wanted an understanding with Cripps on this issue before giving its support to the Government's war efforts.

Since the long-term proposals of the Draft were not received favourably by most of the parties (though the Muslim League was on the whole in its favour), the success of the Mission depended on the discussions over the interim part of the proposals.

Cripps, who was earnestly trying for a settlement, did not contemplate the failure of his mission at so early a date. As such, he wanted to continue the negotiations with the Congress on the defence issue. He climbed down from his earlier stand when he had very often maintained in his interviews and public speeches that the subject of defence was outside the purview of the discussion of the Draft.

In his letter of 1 March 1942, Cripps had suggested that Maulana Azad should have a meeting with the Commander-in-Chief, Wavell, along with Nehru for a discussion on the question of defence. He himself asked the Commander-in-Chief to meet them in order to explain the technical difficulties of the situation connected with the defence proposals so that they too might make suggestions as to the division of responsibilities in this sphere of government.³⁴

The offer was accepted and Maulana Azad and Nehru had a meeting with Wavell on 4 April 1942. It was proposed by the Congress leaders that one of the members of the Executive Council would deal with problems relating to the war, to be known as the Indian Defence Member. But the precise relationship between the two, Commander-in-Chief and the Defence Member, was not ascertained. The Indian Defence Member was to have responsibilities but no power with him. The supremacy

³⁴Cripps to Maulana Azad, 1 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 598.

of the Commander-in-Chief was to be maintained and the Defence Member was to look after the Canteens, Commissariat and Transport, and was not supposed to concern himself with the military operations. The meeting thus remained inconclusive.

The Cripps Solution

On 7 April 1942, after consulting His Majesty's Government, Cripps making a vain bid to break the deadlock put forward a fresh proposal to Maulana Azad. According to this proposal (a) the Commander-in-Chief was to retain a seat on the Viceroy's Executive Council as War Member. Subject to the control of His Majesty's Government and the War Cabinet, in which a representative Indian was to sit with equal power in all matters relating to the defence of India, the Commander-in-Chief was also to retain full control over all the military operations of the armed forces in India. (b) An Indian representative member was to be added to the Viceroy's Executive and was to be handed over those sections of the Department of Defence which could have organizationally been separated from the Commander-in-Chief's War Department.

This member was also to take over the Defence Co-ordination Department which was, at the moment, directly under the Viceroy and certain other important functions of the Government of India which were directly related to defence but which had not fallen under any of the existing departments.

Matters to be transferred from the Defence Department to the Defence Co-ordination Department under the Indian representative member consisted of: (a) Public relations; (b) Demobilization and post-war reconstruction; (c) A Petroleum officer whose functions were to calculate the requirements of and make provision for all petroleum products required for the army, navy, and air force, and for the Civil Departments, including storage and distribution; (d) Indian representation on the Eastern Group Supply Council; (e) Amenities for and welfare of troops and their dependents including the Indian Soldiers' Board; (f) All canteen organisations; (g) Certain non-technical

educational institutions, e.g. Lawrence schools, KGRIM schools, and the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College; (h) Stationery, printing and forms for the army; and (i) Reception, accommodation and social arrangements for all foreign missions, representatives and officers.

Finally, referring to the Indianization of the Executive Council, it was suggested:

His Majesty's Government are anxious to give representative Indians the maximum possible participation in the Government (during the interim period and) that all those main aspects of the defence of India which at present fall under the cadre of other members of the Executive (e.g. civil defence, supply, home affairs, communication, etc.) will, if the scheme is accepted, be administered by representative members in the new National Government.³⁵

Congress Rejects the Proposal

Cripps' new proposal did not clarify fully the powers which the Indian representative member would have. In fact on clarification by the Congress, Cripps excluded the power of recruitment from the purview of the Indian representative member. Congress regarded the functions of the Indian representative, as proposed by the new scheme as totally insufficient, unimportant and peripheral, and the same day its Working Committee rejected that formula.

Louis Johnson Formula

Once more the end of the Mission seemed imminent but at this juncture Colonel Louis Johnson, the Special Representative of the US President came to its rescue. With the prior approval of Cripps he placed another compromise formula before the Congress on 8 April 1942 which later came to be known as the "Johnson Formula".³⁶

³⁵Cripps to Maulana Azad, 7 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 683-4.

³⁶Colonel Louis Johnson was appointed President Roosevelt's Personal Representative in India on 11 March 1942 and was asked to assume charge within three weeks. He had reached India during the deadlock over the proposals on 3 April 1942, and in his personal capacity took an active

According to the Johnson Formula (a) the Defence Department was to be in the charge of a representative Indian member with the exception of functions to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief as War Member of the Executive Council, and (b) a War Department was to be constituted to take over such functions of the Defence Department as were not retained by the Defence Minister. The formula further stipulated: "A list of all the retained functions has been agreed to which will be added further important responsibilities including matters now dealt with by the Defence Co-ordination Department and other vital matters related to the Defence of India."³⁷

While the Cripps formula had explicitly accepted the authority and control of the Commander-in-Chief over all the war activities of the armed forces in India, thereby leaving only insignificant sections of Indian Defence in the hands of the Indian representative, the Johnson formula left the entire issue vague, to be decided through negotiations by the parties concerned.

It, however, did suggest the creation of two separate departments, one, the Defence Department and the other being the War Department, each to be headed by the Indian representative and the Commander-in-Chief respectively.

Thus, while the Cripps formula had closed the doors of the negotiations on the defence issue by allotting minor functions to the Indian representative, the formula of Louis Johnson left the scope of the discussion wide open and the Congress did not find any trouble in considering his proposals.

The Johnson Formula Modified

The same day, the Congress Working Committee sug-

part in the negotiations to resolve the deadlock. Apart from meeting Sir Stafford Cripps, the Viceroy, and General Sir Archibald Wavell, he had meetings with the Indian leaders. "For a week", so ran a contemporary account, "it looked as though the centre of gravity shifted from Cripps to Johnson, from London to New York, from Churchill to Roosevelt."

Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1947), Vol. 2, p. 317.

³⁷Note by Pinnell, 7 April 1942, *CM*, pp. 688-9.

gested some modifications in the Johnson formula. Also contrary to the Cripps proposal, which had reserved defence as the sole responsibility of His Majesty's Government and had asked the Indian Defence Member to accept certain relatively unimportant subjects, it proposed that the National Government should be responsible for the whole field of administration, including defence.

As modified, the formula read as follows:

- (a) The Defence Department shall be placed in the charge of a representative Indian Member, but certain functions relating to the conduct of the war will be exercised, for the duration of war, by the Commander-in-Chief, who will be in control of the war activities of the armed forces in India, and who will be extraordinary member of the National Cabinet for that purpose.
- (b) War Department will be constituted under the Commander-in-Chief. This Department will take over such functions as are to be exercised by the Commander-in-Chief. A list of such functions has been prepared and is attached.
- (c) The Defence Member shall be in charge of all other matters relating to Defence including those now dealt with by the Defence Co-ordination Department.³⁸

While amending the Johnson formula, the Working Committee, too, did not put forward any list of functions either for the Commander-in-Chief or for the Defence Member and left that for discussion and negotiation.

Forwarding the modified Draft to Cripps, the Congress President remarked:

The approach made in the draft you gave me this morning seems to us a more healthy one. With some alterations that we suggest, it might be the basis of further discussions. But it must be remembered that a very great deal depends on the allocation of subjects between the Defence Department and the War Department, and

³⁸Menon, n. 32, p. 128.

until this is done, it is not possible to give a final opinion.³⁹

Cripps-Johnson Formula

In the afternoon of the same day (8 April) Cripps redrafted the earlier formula [in consultation with Colonel Louis Johnson without discussing it with the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. Immediately, the formula which was later called by the Viceroy as 'Cripps-Johnson Formula' was conveyed to the Congress leaders by Johnson.

The redrafted formula, while retaining the clauses of the Johnson formula with slight modifications also contained some additions. Revision was made that in the event of any new functions to be discharged in relation to defence or any dispute arising out of the allocation of any old functions, His Majesty's Government would decide that.

The formula specified only the functions to be allotted to the Commander-in-Chief and left everything else; falling within the scope of 'Defence' to the Indian Defence Member. According to the formula, the War Department, with the Commander-in-Chief as its Member, was to be responsible for Governmental relations of General, Headquarter Naval and Air Headquarters.

These included: (i) Examining and sanctioning all proposals emanating from GHQ, NHQ and AHQ; (ii) Representing the policy of Government on all questions connected with the war which originated in or concerned GHQ, NHQ or AHQ; (iii) Acting as the channel of communication between the Government of India and His Government on all such questions; and (iv) Acting Majesty's as liaison between these headquarters and other Departments of Government, and provincial Governments.⁴⁰

The Congress Considers the Formula

The Congress Working Committee which was in continuous session from 29 March onwards, considered the formula the same night. The formula had not put forward any specific list of functions for the Indian Defence Member

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Linlithgow to Amery, *CM*, pp. 699-700.

and had spelt out only the functions to be allotted to the Commander-in-Chief. Even the term 'Governmental relations', which the formula mentioned while indicating the functions of the War Department, was vague and ambiguous. It was not clear whether it was meant to describe the power of the Commander-in-Chief or that the various matters mentioned under the four heads were required to go through the channel of the War Department for which the Commander-in-Chief would be member.⁴¹ "This was so widely and comprehensively framed", wrote Maulana Azad to Cripps on 10 April, that "it was difficult for us to know what the actual allocation of subjects and departments as between the Defence Department and the War Department would be."⁴² The Working Committee, therefore, wanted an illustrative list of subjects to be put under the two separate Departments of Defence Member and Commander-in-Chief for their further consideration of the formula but no such list was supplied.

On 9 April 1942 the Working Committee again resumed its discussion, which was continued till the 10th. However, as the Working Committee had not been able to gather the full picture of the latest British proposals over the defence issue as it was not supplied with the list of subjects to be allocated to the two separate Departments of Defence and War, it found it difficult to take the decision. At this stage, it deputed Azad and Nehru to see and discuss the matter with Cripps and report back the next morning.

Cripps Retracts

On 9 April Churchill received the Cripps-Johnson formula. He asked Cripps not to 'commit' the British Government in any way without getting the opinion of the Viceroy as well as of the Commander-in-Chief and the discussion by the War Cabinet.⁴³ The same day Amery received the Viceroy's communication in which he had strongly reacted to the provision in the latest formula, envisaging the decision to lie with His Majesty's Government, in the

⁴¹Pattabhi Sitaramayya, n. 36, p. 318.

⁴²Maulana Azad to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *CM*, p. 728.

⁴³Churchill to Cripps, 9 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 703.

event of any new functions falling to be discharged in relation to defence or any dispute as to allocation of old functions between the Commander-in-Chief and the Indian Representative Member in charge of the Defence Department. The fact that in the formulation of the proposal both the Commander-in-Chief as well as the Viceroy were ignored, had also annoyed him.⁴⁴

Now the War Cabinet started discussing the Cripps-Johnson formula. It took note of the Viceroy's reactions and viewed the language of the formula, regarding the divisions of functions between the War Department and the Defence Department as somewhat derogatory to the Commander-in-Chief and "open to misconstructions."⁴⁵

The War Cabinet also discussed the letter of Cripps to Azad of 7 April and expressed its uneasiness and indignation over Cripps' pronouncement, envisaging a 'national government' and transferring of all important portfolios to the Indians. "If it was contemplated that all the members of Viceroy's Council would be Indians, this would put the Viceroy into an impossible position" as he was to meet a persistent and organised opposition in his Council. The Cabinet felt that Cripps in his discussions on paragraph (e) had gone beyond its original intentions.

Cripps received the Cabinet's views on his formula the same day and realized the futility of continuing the negotiations on the lines which he had embarked upon. It virtually nullified his position as a negotiator and asked him "to bring the whole matter back to Cabinet's plan which you went out to urge, with only such amplifications as are agreed to be put forward".⁴⁶

The Viceroy had also reminded Cripps the same day that the constitutional position of the Viceroy's Council could not be altered and had asked him to make this point clear to the Congress leaders in the meeting which they were supposed to have the same day.⁴⁷ Earlier on 6 April, after getting the approval of the Cabinet, Amery

⁴⁴Linlithgow to Amery, 9 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 697-8.

⁴⁵War Cabinet, conclusions 45, 9 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 705-7.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Linlithgow to Cripps, 9 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 709.

had also clearly instructed Cripps that there could be no surrender of authority of the Viceroy conferred on him by the Act of 1935 and that "the constitutional position must remain that the Viceroy in Council acts as a collective body responsible to the Secretary of State and subject to the Viceroy's special powers and duties. . . . There should be no misunderstanding between you and Indian political leaders on this point."⁴⁸

It is obvious from the above correspondence that without previous agreement, the War Cabinet would not approve the scheme proposing a National Government on the lines on which he was intending. This left Cripps with no alternative except to retract his steps.

On 9 April 1942 Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru came to see Cripps at 5.30 p.m. to obtain clarification in matters regarding the allocation of subjects to the two Departments of Defence and War before the Working Committee's meeting started the next morning.

For more than two hours they discussed the new defence formula with him and they asked for the illustrative lists of subjects for the two Departments of War and Defence which they were promised earlier. To their utter surprise, Cripps merely referred to the old list for the Defence Department, which had been rejected earlier by the Congress on 7 April 1942. He maintained that "substantially there was no change between the old list, and any new one that might be prepared."⁴⁹

Similarly, while he had earlier stood for a Cabinet Government in India on the basis of some new conventions, he changed his stand on this issue too and maintained that the Viceroy's Council's constitutional position could not be altered in any way during the war period.

Last bid of Cripps

On 10 April 1942, anticipating that the Congress Working Committee would reject the offer, Cripps, desperately made the last attempt to get the approval of the War

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 663.

⁴⁹Maulana Azad to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 728-9.

Cabinet to the Defence proposals. He put forward the list of functions of the War Member and assured the Cabinet that though the constituted Executive Council, was to be called a National Government, its legal and constitutional position was not to be changed.⁵⁰

Bitterly resenting the proposed transformation of his Executive Council into a National Government, the Viceroy contacted the Secretary of State for India the same day (10 April) for eliciting the views of His Majesty's Government on the point in dispute.

He enquired "whether the Governor-General must continue to have the right to differ from his colleagues (under Section 41 of the Ninth Schedule) or he must promise that in no circumstances will he refuse to act upon his advice."⁵¹ He expressed his strong opposition to Cripps-Johnson formula on Defence for which neither he himself, nor the Commander-in-Chief were consulted and which was ultimately passed over to the Congress. His resentment of the formula was understandable; the formula had undermined his position, status and authority and had clearly by-passed him by taking the settlement of disputes about the functions of the Defence Member and the War Member, if any, out of his jurisdiction and placing it in the hands of His Majesty's Government.

The India Committee of the War Cabinet, meeting the same day (10 April) gave its judgement in favour of the Viceroy. "There can be no question", ran its communication, "of any convention limiting in any way your (the Viceroy's) powers under the existing constitution . . . and no departure from this can be contemplated during the war."⁵²

The attitude of the War Cabinet caused indignation to Cripps who found himself very much aggrieved. He immediately lodged his strong complaint to the Cabinet and wanted to resign. "I am sorry that my colleagues", he wrote, "appear to distrust me over this matter, and I am

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 713-14.

⁵¹Linlithgow to Amery, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 718.

⁵²War Cabinet to Linlithgow, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 720.

quite prepared to hand the matter over if they would rather some one else carried on the negotiations.’’⁵³

In reply to the Cripps communication, Churchill once more emphasized that, though there was no question of want of trust, his suggestion of a convention affecting the Viceroy's authority and status could not be agreed upon and that the Cabinet definitely rejected it.⁵⁴

The attitude of the War Cabinet in general and that of Churchill in particular, discouraged Cripps. He did not see any rationale behind continuing the negotiations when the War Cabinet had refused to accept the compromise formula. This led to an end of the negotiations.

Left with no other option, Cripps astounded Nehru, Azad and Johnson, in their meeting of 9 April 1942, with the statement that the original defence offer would stand and that no far-reaching change was to be contemplated in the structure of the Viceroy's Executive Council. This was a reluctant retraction from the steps which he had taken on both the issues during the negotiations.

Congress Rejects the Draft

Continuing its meeting on 10 April 1942, the Congress Working Committee conveyed its final rejection of the British scheme at about 7 p. m. Reacting strongly to Cripps' behaviour and reply, Azad wrote to Cripps:

When we asked you for illustrative lists of subjects for the two Departments you referred us to the old list for the Defence Department which you had previously sent us and which we had been unable to accept. You added that certain residuary subjects might be added to this but in effect there was not likely to be any such subject as the allocation was complete. Thus you said that substantially there was no change between the old list and any new one that might be prepared. If this was so and we were to go back ultimately to the place we started from, then what was the purpose of our search-

⁵³Cripps to War Cabinet, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 717.

⁵⁴Churchill to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 721-22.

ing for new formulae, a new set of words meaning the same thing made no difference.⁵⁵

The letter concluded thus :

While we cannot accept the proposals you have made, we want to inform you that we are yet prepared to assume responsibility, provided a truly National Government is formed. We are prepared to put aside for the present all questions about the future, though, as we have indicated, we hold definite views about it. But in the present, the national government must be a Cabinet Government with full power and must not merely be a continuation of the Viceroy's Executive Council.⁵⁶

In his reply to Maulana Azad the same day, Cripps turned down the Congress demand for forming a National Government as it was an impossible task during the war. He accepted Azad's letter as being a clear rejection of His Majesty's Government's Draft by the Congress Working Committee⁵⁷ and the negotiations terminated.

Roosevelt's attempt

On the evening of 10 April 1942, Churchill informed Roosevelt of the rejection of the Draft by the Indian National Congress, not merely on the defence issue but also on the question of the formation of a National Government.⁵⁸

The next morning, Roosevelt received Johnson's cable from New Delhi. The embittered Johnson informed the President that "London wanted a Congress refusal" as Churchill and the Viceroy had badly discouraged and undermined Cripps.⁵⁹

The President did not welcome the news of the collapse of the negotiations and was not convinced by the British Premier's report. He cabled Churchill on the afternoon of

⁵⁵Maulana Azad to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *CM*, pp. 728-9.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Menon, n. 32, pp. 130-31.

⁵⁸Churchill to Roosevelt, 11 April 1942, *Foreign Relations of United States: Diplomatic Papers*, 1942, (Washington), Vol. 1, pp. 632-3. (Herein after referred to as *FRUS*, *DP*).

⁵⁹Telegram from New Delhi, 11 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 631-2.

11 April 1942 urging that Cripps' departure be postponed and negotiations be reopened on the basis that India could be given immediately the opportunity to set up a National Government. Roosevelt was firm that this might lead to an agreement.

Challenging the Prime Minister's interpretation of the failure, he further maintained:

I am sorry to say that I cannot agree with the point of view set forth in your message to me that public opinion in the United States believes that the negotiations have failed on broad general issues. The general impression here is quite the contrary. The feeling is almost universally held that the deadlock has been caused by the unwillingness of the British Government to concede to the Indians the right of self-government, notwithstanding the willingness of the Indians to entrust technical, military, and naval defense control to the competent British authorities. American public opinion cannot understand why, if the British Government is willing to permit the component parts of India to secede from the British Empire after the war, it is not willing to permit them to enjoy what is tantamount to self-government during the war.⁶⁰

The President's Appeal Rejected

Churchill, however, opposed the reopening of negotiations. To him, the Mission had finally failed. He rejected Roosevelt's appeal with all politeness, though his war memoirs reflected outright scorn for Roosevelt's approach and ideas contained in his appeal.⁶¹

On 12 April 1942, Churchill cabled the President that he could not decide the matter without the approval of the War Cabinet which could be convened only the next day, i.e. 13 April 1942. Moreover, Cripps had already left India. As such, the suggestion of the President could not be put into effect. He concluded: "Anything like a serious difference between you and me would break my heart and

⁶⁰Roosevelt to Churchill, 11 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 633-4.

⁶¹Churchill, *The Hinges of Fate* (Boston, 1950), pp. 219-20.

surely deeply injure both our countries at the height of this terrible struggle.”⁶²

Roosevelt Gives Up

In his letter to the American President though Nehru did not appeal for Roosevelt’s aid, he emphasized the military potentialities of a free India and the popular opposition to the Japanese.⁶³ By this time, the President had also received Churchill’s communication of 12 April 1942. In the interest of American-British relations, he did not feel it wise to press Churchill further as this might have risked an open break in their friendly relations at this critical juncture.

This mood of the State Department was evident from its reply to Nehru’s appeal which ran as follows:

The President greatly appreciates your letter dated April 12, which had been received through Colonel Johnson. He has been deeply gratified by the message which it contains. He feels sure that all the people of India will make every possible effective effort to resist Japanese aggression in every part of India. To the utmost of its ability the Government of the United States will contribute towards that common cause.⁶⁴

Johnson Fails

Meanwhile, still hopeful of a settlement between the British and the Congress if the American President pressurized the Churchill administration, Johnson urged Roosevelt on 21 April 1942 to call upon China and Britain to issue a joint statement on Pacific War aims, including freedom for India and the determination to defend India.⁶⁵ He wanted the Congress and the British approval before 29 April 1942, the day when the All-India Congress Committee was to meet at Allahabad, to consider apart from other things, Gandhi’s call for non-violent resistance to the Japanese. The State Department did not appreciate his

⁶²Churchill to Roosevelt, 12 April 1942, *ERUS, DP*, pp. 634-5.

⁶³Nehru to Roosevelt, 13 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 635-7.

⁶⁴Roosevelt to Nehru, 15 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 637.

⁶⁵Telegram from New Delhi, 21 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 638-9.

suggestion and on 27 April 1942, it cabled Johnson that a statement of Pacific War aims would not be made. It further warned him against getting too closely identified with any particular political group.⁶⁶

Johnson made a last appeal to the President on 4 May 1942 by urging the transfer of the Viceroy's Executive Council into a National Government appropriately represented by the Indian political parties and groups. The "Johnson Formula" still stood as a solution of the defence issue.⁶⁷ On 8 May 1942, Roosevelt rejected Johnson's request. He was advised by Welles (Advisor to Roosevelt on India's Policy) that India was now primarily a military concern and that political discussions would only worsen communal tensions and cause further bitterness and hostility between the Indians and the British, thereby affecting the defence of the country more adversely.⁶⁸

In the face of this rebuff by the President Johnson gave up hopes of a settlement of the Indian problem. On 16 May 1942, Johnson departed from India, a departure hastened by his failure to attain a political settlement of the Indian problem, poor health being the ostensible reason. This was the end of his forty-three day mission in India.

The persistent and sincere efforts of Colonel Louis Johnson could not save the Mission from being wrecked. R. Coupland rightly Comments that "April 10, the last day of the Mission's work at Delhi, was its worst."⁶⁹ Earlier on two occasions the Mission could have received this verdict, first on 2 April and then on 7 April. On the former occasion it was the Congress Working Committee which had decided not to release its rejection to the press and to have further negotiations over that "cut and dried scheme" which Cripps had brought with him.

On the latter occasion it was Johnson who had saved the talks temporarily by asking the Congress Working Committee not to publish the contents of its rejection of the Cripps' Defence Formula and had come forward with his

⁶⁶Telegram to New Delhi, *ibid.*, pp. 644-5.

⁶⁷Telegram from New Delhi, 4 May 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 648-50.

⁶⁸Telegram to New Delhi, 8 May 1942, *ibid.*, p. 650.

⁶⁹Coupland, n. 25, p. 48.

own defence scheme to which Cripps was also agreed. Notwithstanding this, the negotiations had foundered on 10 April 1942 on the issues of Defence and National Government.

4

The Failure of the Cripps Mission

The great expectations and high hopes which the Cripps Mission had aroused in India were belied and frustrated when Cripps discussed his scheme with the political parties and groups. The Mission did not carry any new offer for India and was only “a cheap but attractive bromide enlargement of the August Offer”¹ which had already been disapproved by the Indian National Congress in 1940. As such, the Mission’s rejection was a foregone conclusion and virtually all the parties and groups, after putting forward their own reasons completed the formalities by 11 April 1942. The following day, the Mission left for home.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his book, *The Discovery of India* writes:

I remember that when I read those proposals for the first time I was profoundly depressed, and that depression was largely due to the fact that I had expected something more substantial from Sir Stafford Cripps as well as from the critical situation that had arisen. The more I read those proposals and considered their many implications, the greater was my feeling of depression. I could understand a person unacquainted with Indian affairs imagining that they went far to meet our demands. But, when analysed, there were so many limitations, and the very acceptance of the principle of

¹Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1947), Vol. 2, p. 327.

self-determination was fettered and circumscribed in such a way as to imperil our future.²

To Mahatma Gandhi, the draft scheme as a whole was unacceptable since it had contained the seeds of Balkanization of the country and had denied the right of self-determination to the State's people. He wrote on 13 April 1942:

It is a thousand pities that the British Government should have sent a proposal for dissolving the political deadlock which, on the face of it, was too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere. And it was a misfortune that the bearer should have been Sir Stafford Cripps acclaimed as a radical among the radicals and a friend of India.³

Earlier also, Gandhi had reacted so strongly to the proposals that he advised Cripps to "take the first plane home". He himself had left Delhi for Sevagram on 2 April 1942 "leaving the Congress Working Committee free to make up its own mind" on the proposals.⁴

Formal Rejection by Congress

On 11 April 1942, the Working Committee of the Congress formally rejected the Draft Declaration by publishing its resolution. The Committee recognised that self-determination for the people of India had been accepted in principle at an uncertain future in the proposals but regretted that it was fettered and circumscribed by the inclusion of certain provisions in the scheme itself which were bound to imperil the development of a free and united nation and the establishment of a democratic state.

The Committee also objected to the exclusion of the ninety million people of the Indian States, who were to be treated as "commodities at their rulers' disposal". This, according to the resolution, was a complete negation of both democracy and self-determination. Further, the acceptance

²Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi, 1961), p. 454.

³V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1957), pp. 135-6.

⁴Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942* (Delhi, 1958), p. 26.

beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a province was regarded as a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity which was likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces, leading to further difficulties for the Indian States acceding to the Indian Union. "Nevertheless", the resolution went on, "the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian union against their declared and established will".

Regarding the proposals concerning the immediate present, the resolution maintained that any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attention and scrutiny, "but in today's grave crisis, it is the present that counts, and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present. The Committee have necessarily attached the greatest importance to this aspect of the question and on this ultimately depends what advice they should give to those who look to them for guidance."

The present British War Cabinet's proposals, it felt, "were vague and altogether incomplete, and it would appear that no vital changes in the present structure are presented."

As regards defence, the Committee maintained that it was a vital subject at any time and during war-time it was all important as it had covered almost every sphere of life and administration. The Committee made it clear that Indian people would assume responsibility for the war only if they felt that they were free and were in charge of maintaining and defending their freedom.⁵

League's Rejection

When the Congress Working Committee rejected the offer of the Mission, the Muslim League's Working Committee followed suit though it was satisfied on the whole with the draft proposals and its President had given the impression of its acceptance of the scheme to Cripps on 28 March 1942. It published its resolution to this effect on April 11.

⁵Nicholas Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47, Cripps Mission* (London, 1970), pp. 745-8. Resolution of the Congress Working Committee, 11 April 1942 (Hereafter referred to as CM.)

*This did not cause any surprise to Cripps as he had himself written to Churchill on 1 April 1942 : "The Muslim League who are prepared to accept will no doubt if Congress refuses also find some reason for refusal as will all other sections of opinion."*⁶

The Committee expressed its dissatisfaction over the inadequacy of the draft proposals which according to it did not make any definite pronouncement in favour of partition. Though "Pakistan is recognised by implication" in the Draft, said the Working Committee's resolution, "its primary object was to create an Indian Union, the creation of more than one union being relegated only to the realm of remote possibility."

It further objected to the system of election by a single electoral college by proportional representation for the setting up of the Constitution-making body. According to the resolution it was "a fundamental departure from the right of the Mussalmans hitherto enjoyed by them to elect their representatives by means of separate electorates", which was "the only sure way in which true representatives of the Mussalmans can be chosen". Further, since the decisions in the constitution-making body were to be taken by a bare majority, the resolution expressed its inability to participate in any form in that proposed body.

Regarding the right of non-accession of Indian provinces, the Committee maintained it was vitiated by the continuance of existing provinces with their illogical frontiers which were formed from time to time for administrative convenience. The Committee resented the absence of definite procedures in the draft proposals as to ascertain verdict of the province in favour of or against the accession to the Union. But at the same time it referred to the letter of 2 April 1942 by the Secretary of Cripps to the President of the Muslim League which stated: "A province should reach the decision whether or not to stand out of the union by a vote in the Legislative Assembly on a resolution to stand in."

The League was not satisfied with it because of the

⁶Cripps to Churchill, 1 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 600.

'weightage' given to the minorities in the electoral arrangements in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal, the proportion of Muslims in the Legislatures did not exactly correspond with the proportion of the population. In the Legislature of the Punjab while the Muslim representation was 50.9% against its population of 57.1%, in the Legislature of Bengal, it was 49.2% as against its population of 54.7%.

"A decision under such conditions", continued the resolution, "cannot be the true criterion of ascertaining the real opinion of the Mussalmans of those provinces." To remove that doubt, Cripps had mentioned in his letter that if the majority for accession to the union was to be less than 60%, the minority would have the right to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population.

The idea of plebiscite, however, was viewed by the League as harmful to the Muslims as it was to be the right of the whole adult male population and not the right of Muslims alone. According to the resolution, it was to deny the Muslims their inherent right to self-determination.

About the interim arrangements, the resolution expressed its inability to form an opinion as clause (e) of the Draft was very vague. "As the Committee", said the resolution, "has come to the conclusion that the proposals for the future are unacceptable, it will serve no useful purpose to deal further with the question of the immediate arrangements." And the Working Committee rejected the proposals because the fundamentals were "not open to any modifications" and were to be accepted or rejected as a whole.⁷

Sikhs also Reject

The Sikhs were against the freedom to the provinces to secede from the Indian Union. They did not want Punjab to be separated from the All India Union and thereby throw themselves into a union which was to be controlled and governed by the Muslims. Opposing the Draft, the Sikh All-Parties Committee had sent a memorandum to

⁷Resolution of Muslim League Working Committee, 11 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 748-51.

Cripps on 31 March 1942 in which they had maintained that the Sikhs stood for national unity and integrity of India. As such, they were strongly opposed to the "vivisection of India into two or three rival dominions or sovereign states as is contemplated in the British proposals". They felt that such a step would lead to a state of perpetual strife and civil war in the country.⁸

Rejection by Hindu Mahasabha

On 3 April 1942, rejecting the scheme, the resolution of the Hindu Mahasabha said that the basic principle of the Sabha was that India was one and indivisible. "The Mahasabha cannot be true to itself and to the best interests of Hindusthan (India) if it is a party to any proposal which involves the political partition of India in any shape or form."⁹

Liberals Repudiate Proposals

In their memorandum submitted on 5 April 1942, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar criticized the British Government's proposals because of its lack of a definite provision for the transfer of power during the war and inclusion of the provision for the possible non-accession of Province or Provinces to the proposed Indian Union. In the introductory paragraph of their memorandum, they made it clear that "Indian opinion attaches the greatest importance to the transfer of real power in the Central Government at the present moment". They wanted the inclusion of an Indian Defence Member in the Executive Council of the Viceroy as "otherwise the Declaration, whatever its other merits may be, will fail to achieve the object it is intended to serve".

Reacting to the provision of non-accession they maintained: "The creation of more than one union howsoever consistent in theory with the principle of self-determination,

⁸ The Sikh All-Parties Committee to Cripps, 31 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 582-8.

⁹ Resolution of the Hindu Mahasabha, 3 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 627-9.

will be disastrous to the lasting interests of the country and its integrity and security.”¹⁰

Depressed Classes Consider Proposals Inadequate

The representatives of the depressed classes, Ambedkar and Rajah, denounced the scheme for its inability to provide the necessary safeguards for their interests. They wrote to Cripps:

We are all of us absolutely convinced that the proposals are calculated to do the greatest harm to the Depressed Classes and are sure to place them under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule. Any such result which takes us back to the black days of the ancient past will never be tolerated by us, and we are all determined to resist any such catastrophe befalling our people with all the means at our command.¹¹

The Neutrality of Princes

The Chamber of the Princes was the only political body in India which, unlike other political parties and groups, adopted an attitude of “benevolent neutrality” towards the Draft proposals. The princes were ready, said the resolution, to participate in the constitution-making body but only on the understanding that (i) in any constitution their sovereignty and treaty rights would be effectively protected, and (ii) states which decided not to join a union would be accorded “the right to form a union of their own with full sovereign status”.¹²

Churchill Happy at Failure

The rejection of Cripps proposals, however, did not seem to cause serious concern¹³ to Churchill. Soon after, he sent the following cable to Cripps on 11 April 1942:

¹⁰Memorandum by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar, 5 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 643-47.

¹¹Ambedkar and Rajah to Cripps, 1 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 603.

¹²Maharaja Jam Saheb of Nawanagar to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 734-35.

¹³“His happiness had marked no bound and he danced around the Cabinet room” Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British-India* (London 1963), p. 90.

You must not feel unduly discouraged or disappointed by the result. The effect throughout Britain and in the United States has been wholly beneficial. . . I am very glad you are coming home at once, where a most cordial welcome awaits you. Even though your hopes have not been fulfilled, you have rendered a very important service to the common cause.¹⁴

H.V. Hodson, the Reform Commissioner in India at that time, writes in his book *The Great Divide*: "When Mr. Churchill learned of the breakdown of the Delhi negotiations he put on an act of sham tears and sorrow before his guests at Chequers, not troubling to conceal his own pleasure."¹⁵

As seen earlier, Churchill had no intention of transferring power to Indians but at the same time he wanted to win the favour of the American public opinion and the British Labour Party—both asking for a positive change in the British policy towards India. Michael Edwardes' comment is revealing in this context: "Churchill had made his gesture of appeasement to the United States and to the Labour members of the War Cabinet. It was a gesture without any meaning."¹⁶

Why Mission Failed

Various reasons have been put forward by people with their different political leanings or otherwise for the failure of the Cripps Mission. V.P. Menon observes that the decision of the War Cabinet itself had carried certain initial handicaps which did affect the fate of the Mission in India. There was—(i) no definite agreement between the Viceroy and the War Cabinet on the details of policy to be pursued; (ii) no understanding between the War Cabinet and Stafford Cripps as to the extent to which they might go in the way of concession to possible demands; and (iii) no agreement or understanding between Cripps and the Viceroy who was to implement the settlement on important details of policy.

¹⁴Churchill to Cripps, 11 April 1942, *CM*, p. 739.

¹⁵H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India and Pakistan* (London 1969), p. 103.

¹⁶Michael Edwardes, n. 13, p. 89.

“An atmosphere”, writes V.P. Menon, “charged with so much uncertainty held but scant prospect of success for the Cripps venture.”¹⁷

H.V. Hodson, the then Reform Commissioner, who was also associated with the Mission in India, ascribes the causes of the Mission’s failure to Cripps and the British War Cabinet. If Cripps could not establish any understanding with the Viceroy, the War Cabinet had not bothered to consult the Viceroy for the framing of the Draft Declaration.¹⁸

In somewhat similar vein, Laski puts the blame for the failure of the Mission on shoulders of Cripps and challenges his wisdom of carrying the Draft proposals. In his opinion : “The Cripps Mission came too late” and looked more “like a counter-move against Japan than a recognition of Indian claims, at any rate to many important Indians.” “It was carried out”, writes Laski, “far too hurriedly; frankly, it was more important for Sir Stafford Cripps to go on working for unity in India than to announce the routine business in the House of Commons.” Further, “it was psychologically disastrous for Cripps to go to India in a “take it or leave it” mood, and on his return, practically announce that we washed our hands of the offer.” As such, Laski came to the conclusion: “That was bound to make it look as though our real thought was less the achievement of Indian freedom than of a *coup de main* in the propagandist’s art among our allies who contrasted American relations with the Philippines against British relations with India.”¹⁹

On the contrary, Johnson, Roosevelt’s personal envoy in India, who was very much hopeful of a settlement between the British Government and the Congress, supports Cripps actions along with Nehru and blames the Churchill administration for the Mission’s failure. Cripps, according to him, was ‘sincere’. “He and Nehru could solve it in five minutes if Cripps had any freedom or authority.” However,

¹⁷V.P. Menon, n. 3, pp. 119-20.

¹⁸Hodson, n. 15, p. 103.

¹⁹Pattabhi Sitaramayya, n. 1, p. 331.

at the time when a satisfactory solution seemed to him imminent "with an unimportant concession", embarrassed Cripps told him that he could not change the original Draft Declaration without Churchill's approval and that Churchill had cabled him that he would give no approval unless Wavell and the Viceroy endorsed the changes.²⁰

Louis Fischer, an American journalist and Professor Guy Hope²¹ have expressed similar views. According to Fisher, Cripps had maintained that "he had full authority to set up a real Cabinet Government in India." But unfortunately, on 9 April, this authority was specifically withdrawn in the new instructions to Cripps from London asking him not to "go beyond" the text of the British Government Draft Declaration unless he obtained the consent of the Viceroy and Wavell. That explains the collapse of the Cripps Mission.²²

Maulana Azad also subscribed to a similar view. To him, the pressure from the British War Cabinet coupled with the influence of the Government of India, were the major factors which had compelled Cripps to change his stand between his first and last interview with the Congress leaders.²³

On the other hand, M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Sri-

²⁰B. Shiva Rao, *India's Freedom Movement* (New Delhi, 1972) p. 189.

²¹A. Guy Hope writes: "Cripps was obviously well-fitted for a role as mediator by his legal training, his popularity in Britain, and his known sympathy for the nationalist leaders. There was moreover enough of St. George in his personality to challenge him to slay the monster problem which had defied previous champions. But rarely has a knight (been armed with sword so blunt that damage to the wielder was more likely than conquest of the dragon."

A. Guy Hope, *America and Swaraj* (Washington, 1968), p. 59.

²²In reply to Stafford Cripps' Secretary, Mr. Graham Spray's article in the *New York Nation* of 13 November 1942, denying that such a promise (about National Government) was made, Louis Fisher further wrote: "Cripps did not withdraw his promise (about National Government) because he made it without sincerity, he withdrew it because he was stabbed in the back by Englishmen who differed from him."

Pattabhi Sitaramayya, n. 1, pp. 328-9.

²³Maulana A.K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 52.

vastava view Hopkin's assurances to Churchill as the decisive factor in the failure of the Mission.²⁴

On 8 April 1942, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's adviser had reached London to discuss military plans. Churchill had not liked the part which Colonel Louis Johnson was playing in the negotiations and when Hopkins saw him the next day (9 April), he questioned Johnson's authority to mediate and wanted to know whether he was acting on his own. The same day, the British War Cabinet had to consider the revised defence formula as drafted by Cripps and Johnson.

According to Venkataramani and Srivastava, Hopkins assured Churchill that the Johnson Mission had nothing to do with the Cripps Mission and that Roosevelt had cautioned him not to be drawn into the question except at Churchill's request and that too, if accepted by the Indian parties.²⁵ Accordingly, Churchill did not pay any heed to the revised formula and brought an end to the negotiations. After his talk with Hopkins, Churchill had cabled Linlithgow that Johnson was mediating in the negotiations not as a representative of the American President but as a private individual.

As expected, His Majesty's Government put the blame for the failure of the Mission solely on the Indian parties. The charge was that they were badly divided over the Draft and there was no meeting ground on the proposals between them. "Sir Stafford", said Amery in the House of Commons, "flew many thousands of miles to meet the Indian leaders in order to arrive at an agreement with them. The Indian leaders in Delhi moved not one step to meet each other."²⁶ Hence the failure of the Mission.

Like Cripps, Attlee held the Indian communal problem responsible for the failure of the Mission:

Cripps did all that a man could do to achieve success, but despite his great sympathy with Indian aspirations

²⁴M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Srivastava: "The United States and the Cripps Mission", *India Quarterly* (New Delhi), Vol. 19, no. 3, July-September 1963, pp. 248-50.

²⁵Hopkins to Churchill, 9 April 1942, *FRUS, DP*, pp. 631-2.

²⁶R. Coupland, *Indian Politics 1936-1942* (London, 1944), p. 281.

and his outstanding ability, he failed to get agreement. The old stumbling block of Hindu-Moslem antagonism could not be overcome and Gandhi, at this time, was not helpful.²⁷

Coupland supports this view in his book, *The Indian Politics—1936-1942*.²⁸

Amba Prasad challenges the validity of this assumption and refutes the charge on the ground that at no time was any 'attempt' made by the British in general and Cripps in particular "to bring different party leaders together". Directly blaming the British Government, he argues that the procedure of Delhi negotiations had "excluded a synthesizing of relations between different parties" as Cripps had consulted almost everybody of importance in every community, group, or party, as well as the important officials separately but had not discussed them "at a common table where party leaders could sit and arrive at some settlement and think of measures of implementing the Declaration."²⁹

Cripps Blames Congress

After Churchill and the War Cabinet refused to accept the compromise formula on defence, which had brought an end to the negotiations, Cripps was left with two options. The first option was to blame the imperialist creed of the British Government. This would have meant a denunciation of the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for India, the Viceroy and the War Cabinet as a whole for sabotaging the Mission by repudiating the essential concessions which he had offered to the Congress for a just settlement. The other option was to suppress the facts by presenting a defence of British policy and charge Congress leaders as the saboteurs of the Mission.

Cripps realized the adverse repercussions of the first option which could have precipitated a constitutional issue leading to his own resignation as well as that of his Labour

²⁷C.R. Attlee, *As it Happened* (London, 1954), p. 181.

²⁸Coupland, n. 26, p. 281.

²⁹Amba Prasad, n. 4, p. 25.

colleagues from the British War Cabinet. Further, he was not in a position to blame His Majesty's Government of which he himself was a member. Therefore, despite his liberal and democratic instincts, decided to go ahead with the second option.

Consequently, he endeavoured to convince the world that the responsibility for the breakdown of the Mission lay with the Indian National Congress.

To substantiate this charge, he cited the letter of the Congress President, Maulana Azad, dated 10 April 1942 in which he had forwarded the resolution of the Congress Working Committee, expressing its inability to accept the proposals as they had stood.

In his letter to the Congress President, Cripps maintained that "the proposals of His Majesty's Government went as far as possible, short of a complete change in the constitution which is generally acknowledged as impracticable in the circumstances of today". Under the circumstances, the Congress demand for treating the Executive Council as Cabinet Government was utterly "illogical and unsound".

For the first time, Cripps resorted to the so-called complexities of the communal issue and following the British practice earlier, expressed His Majesty's Government's inability to accept the Congress demand for the Cabinet Government.

He wrote to Azad:

Were such a system to be introduced by convention under the existing circumstances the nominated Cabinet (nominated presumably by the major political organisations), responsible to no one but itself, could not be removed and would in fact constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority.³⁰

³⁰Cripps to Maulana Azad, 10 April, 1942, *CM*, pp. 732-3. In his broadcast on 11 April 1942, he further tried his best to malign the Congress and mislead his listeners by suggesting that the Congress aimed at the creation of an oligarchie, irresponsible and permanent government, the majority being in a position to dominate the minorities which was, Cripps maintained, not to be accepted by the minorities.

The Congress was told that since communal divisions were very deep, an irresponsible government of the type which the Congress had meant was not possible and "until such time as the Indian people frame their new constitution His Majesty Government must continue to carry out its duties to those large sections of the Indian people to whom it has given its pledge".³¹

The Real Responsibility

The evidence, on the contrary, reveals that the real responsibility for the failure of the Mission lay with Churchill's War Cabinet and the Viceroy, imperialist considerations being the motivating and guiding factor. The British War Cabinet, in general, and Churchill and the Viceroy, in particular, were in no mood to grant self-rule to the Indians in 1942 and hence while drafting the new declaration of policy they did not go beyond the spirit of the "August Offer" of 1940. Preservation and maintenance of imperialist control over India, was still the British rulers' imperative though it made half-hearted and illusive gestures in form of offering some concessions here and there.

Thus, Roosevelt's attempts for the renewal of the negotiations on the basis of granting Indians the right of self-rule in 1942 were frustrated because any insistence on his part at this juncture would have strained relationship between the UK and the USA. This repudiates the contention of those who maintain Hopkins' assurances to Churchill as the decisive factor in the failure of the Mission. "Considering Churchill's rebuff of Roosevelt's personal efforts", writes Gary R. Hess, "it is unlikely that he (Churchill) would have accepted Johnson as having any authority to intervene in British-Indian relations."³²

In view of the serious war peril to India, the Congress had put aside its objections to some of the proposals for the future and in its negotiations with Cripps had concentrated on the formation of a national government. In

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cary R. Hess, *America Encounters India 1941-1947* (London, 1971), p. 50.

his statements and private talks Cripps had talked of a "Cabinet Government" and had given the assurances to the Congress leaders and others that, though no legal change would be possible in the constitution during the period, some conventions would be established and that the Viceroy would function merely as a constitutional head, like the King of England. This being so, the only issue that had remained for consideration and adjustment was that of Defence.

A number of formulae were discussed and a final settlement was seemingly in sight so much so that on 9 April 1942, like the Congress Savarkar maintained his opposition to the constitutional scheme, but wanted the Mahasabha to take its place in the National Government. It was also rumoured during this period that, though he was evidently withholding his decision on the Draft Declaration awaiting the Congress reply, Jinnah had actually nominated the League's representatives on it. But the seeming settlement of the defence issue and thereby the success of the Mission was undermined by the Churchill Administration in general and the Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow axis, in particular.

The cables and other communications between London and New Delhi on 5 April and after clearly indicate that the ruling triumvirate was opposed to any change in the constitution affecting the existing Viceroy's supreme position in the Executive Council in any form. And they ensured that when Cripps saw the Congress leaders on 9 April in the evening he could tell them only that "nothing could be said . . . even vaguely and generally about the conventions that should govern the new government and the Viceroy. This was a matter in the Viceroy's sole discretion and, at a later stage, it could be discussed directly with the Viceroy."³³

When Johnson returned to Washington later in the summer, he said in a confidential report :

The Viceroy and others in authority were determined at the time of Cripps Mission that the necessary concessions should not be made and are still of the same

³³Azad to Cripps, 10 April 1942, *CM*, p. 729.

opinion; the British are prepared to lose India as they lost Burma, rather than make any concessions to the Indians in the belief that India will be returned to them after the war with the *status quo ante* prevailing³⁴.

The disclosure of facts in various official correspondences and the letter of Maulana Azad are sufficiently Convincing to establish that, whatever gesture Cripps made, was hastily designed to exculpate himself and His Majesty's Government from the charge of sabotaging the seeming success of the Mission. "The real question", wrote Nehru, "was the transfer of power to the National Government. It was the old issue of Indian nationalism versus British imperialism, and on that issue, war or no war, the British Governing class in England and in India was determined to hold on to what it had. Behind them stood the imposing figure of Mr. Winston Churchill".³⁵

³⁴B. Shiva Rao, n. 20, p. 191.

³⁵Jawaharlal Nehru, n. 2, p. 464.

5

Conclusion

In the light of the above study, it is evident that two factors compelled the War Cabinet to despatch the Cripps Mission. One was the American pressure and the other was Labour Party's insistence at home. America was really anxious to see India participate with the Allies as an independent nation in the war but it did not want this issue to sour its friendship with the British Government at a critical juncture. The Labour Party wanted the Government to give up the "lie back and not move" policy and take new initiatives to break the Indian constitutional deadlock. However, their main objective in 1942 did not appear to be the independence of India but only to secure the support of Indian leadership in war efforts.

During the early days of his Mission in India, Cripps had been earnest in his approach and sincere in his objective. This created a favourable atmosphere for a settlement. However, the die-hard ruling Conservatives, led by the Churchill-Amery-Linlithgow axis, did not appreciate it and started obstructing the seeming success of the Mission after April 5, 1942. The Axis finally sabotaged it on 9 April and Cripps, who was empowered by the War Cabinet to negotiate the scheme under clause (e) of the Draft was deprived of his status as a negotiator to evolve a settlement with the Indian political leaders, on 10 April 1942.¹ Attlee, the leader of the Labour Party and Deputy

¹ Churchill to Cripps, 10 April 1942, in Nicholas Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, eds., *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: The Cripps Mission, January-April 1942* (London, 1970), Vol. 1, p. 722.

Prime Minister, was partly responsible for the failure of the Mission and for missing an opportunity which had been provided by the Congress, Johnson and Cripps himself to come to a settlement.

Once more, the British Labour Party, which had advocated freedom for India publicly as early as 1918 and 1923 in the general elections, exposed its dubious character and chose to accept silently the Conservative policy. In power, it committed the same wrong to India for which it had criticized the Conservatives in the past and like them preferred to maintain the imperialist hold over India under the garb of so-called complexities of Indian politics, especially the communal problem. The episode substantiated Lord Reading (Liberal Party), who when he was Viceroy, had told the Imperial Legislative Assembly on 31 January 1924 that the Indian question was not a party question but a matter of national policy in Britain.

In 1924, when the Labour Party was heading the British Government under Ramsay MacDonald, and when Reading was the Viceroy, the unanimous resolution of the Imperial Legislative Assembly, urging the revision of the Government of India Act 1919 with a view to establish full responsible government in India had been bluntly turned down.

The then Secretary of State for India, Lord Oliver, a top-ranking Labourite scorned at the possibility of any progress towards Home Rule for the Indians, divided into various antagonistic groups and communities. In the House of Commons, which was debating the issue (15 April 1924), all parties had agreed that no immediate political advance was needed.

In 1932 the Labour Party had gone to such an extent that most hated 'Communal Award' was announced by Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald. This was based on the imperialist theory that India was not a nation but a congery of religious, racial and cultural groups, castes and interests. It was a confirmation of the old reactionary policy of "Divide and Rule" as had been enunciated by Morley-Minto in 1909, Montagu-Chelmsford in 1919 and the Simon Commission in their report of 1930.

During the war, the Labour Party had given its meek consent to Churchill's decision that the Atlantic Charter was not applicable to India. While the Cripps Mission was in India, the Labour Party's attitude was only a natural corollary to its earlier approach towards India. Further, "Attlee's staunch loyalty to Churchill during the war", writes R.J. Moore, "is well-known".²

Between 6 and 10 April, Churchill had applied the acid test to it and Attlee had proved true to the occasion. The exposure of the Labour Party is all the more confirmed when we find them in tune with the Conservatives, accusing and denouncing the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi for having scuttled the Mission.

Evidence reveals that the Viceroy and his circle were not justified in their criticism of Cripps that he was devious and deceitful and had not played straight with the Viceroy over the reform of his executive. This is also true of the charge that Cripps had defied the instructions of the War Cabinet by going "well beyond his brief" with regard to the Executive.

Soon after his arrival in Delhi, Cripps had told Hodson, the then Reform Commissioner: "You must realise that the Cabinet has quite made up its mind that India shall have everything in the way of *de facto* Dominion Status and Complete Indianisation of the Executive Council."³

Cripps had kept the Viceroy informed of his plans for reconstituting the Executive Council. Nor can it be denied that he had been sent by the War Cabinet specifically to negotiate an acceptable scheme with the Indian political parties and groups so as to secure their support in the war efforts under clause (e) of the Draft Declaration. Accordingly Cripps had gathered the impression from the Cabinet decision and instructions that he had to act as a negotiator to reach a settlement. There is no evidence to suggest that he

²R.J. Moore, "The Mystery of the Cripps Mission", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* (Leicester). Vol. 2, no. 3, November 1973, p. 210.

³H. V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain, India and Pakistan* (London, 1969) p. 103.

had not acted in accordance with the Cabinet's instructions.

Cripps sincerely and seriously approached the Indian problem and tried to bring a settlement by offering representative Indians a place on the Viceroy's Executive Council and the Defence Department. He had considered the step necessary for reaching an understanding with the Indians which was unlikely to embarrass the British authorities in India. The Viceroy, however, had been unhappy over it and Cripps was snubbed and ultimately refused the status of a negotiator. All this leads one to the conclusion that he applied himself earnestly to the Cabinet instructions with which he came to negotiate.

The mistake which he appears to have committed was that he over-reached his brief as a negotiator and began holding out the rather extravagant promise of a national Cabinet, responsible not to the Viceroy but to the Legislature and handing over the charge of Defence to Indian hands, except some vital issues which were to be retained by the Commander-in-Chief. Till 5 April he seems to have paid little heed to the pronouncements of the Viceroy and the British Government on the issue and proceeded with his plan by taking the help of Louis Johnson, only to be finally repudiated on 9 and 10 April 1942.

It is surprising how a mature politician like him did not realise the futility of his efforts in the face of the known antipathy of Churchill to any radical change in the Government's India policy. He seemed to lack political insight in this respect. He unduly kept on the negotiations, arousing false hopes of a settlement and kept the Indian nation in suspense. This baffled the Congress leaders and cost him his credibility as a supporter of India's freedom movement.

Equally surprising is the way Cripps, who had been a victim of a "stab in his back by the British Government" became a "willing agent of a policy of Machievallian" dissimulation while negotiating in India, profound hypocrisy and perfidy that knew no touch of remorse, as De Quincy would say.⁴

⁴Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1947), Vol. 2. p. 337.

To justify his failure, Cripps launched on a propaganda campaign against the Congress and its leadership by resorting to half-truths that the Congress wanted to tyrannize over the minorities, that he had not used the word 'Cabinet' and other similar expressions in the strict constitutional sense of the 'term', that Gandhi had called the offer as a "post-dated cheque on a crashing bank", and that the proposals were rejected by the Congress at Gandhi's instigation.⁵

After his return to England, Cripps made the following broadcast: "We offered representative Indian political leaders immediate office in the Viceroy's Executive Council a body of ministers like those who advise your (American) President."⁶ Such misrepresentation of facts was strongly denied by the Congress President, Maulana Azad in his letter to Cripps, dated 10 April 1942 and was characterised by Pattabhi Sitaramayya as "a blatant lie" and "a gross untruth, not merely terminological inexactitude".⁷

The changed behaviour of Cripps compelled his closest friend in India, Jawaharlal Nehru, to say: "It is sad beyond measure that a man like Sir Stafford Cripps should allow himself to become the devil's advocate."⁸ "Sir Stafford Cripps", said Pant, "has been sedulously propagating lies, faithfully following in the steps of Mr. Amery and others, only his methods are more subtle and insidious."⁹

British contention that Mahatma Gandhi was the brain behind the Congress refusal of the offer does not seem to be valid either. Facts indicate that the Congress Working Committee had rejected the Draft Declaration only on the basis of its own judgement which it had acquired after considering the pros and cons of the proposals.

Gandhiji had made it clear to the Congress Working Committee that it was completely free to take its own

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*National Herald* (Lucknow), 30 July 1942.

⁹*Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 22 April 1942.

decision.¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajagopalachari, who were members of the Working Committee, had strongly denied any interference in the matter by Gandhiji and maintained that he had nothing to do with the Working Committee's decision.¹¹

The British argument does not seem convincing that transfer of power to Indian hands was even unthinkable during the war as that would have given birth to communal rivalries and would have affected the war efforts adversely. The approach and aim of the Congress had been national and not communal. Similarly, Indians did not lack in administrative and legislative experience.

This was evident from the functioning of the Congress Ministries which were in power for a very short period—from 1937 to 1939. The experiment had worked satisfactorily as was evident from the way, the communal, social, economic and political problems of the country were approached and handled by the Congress Ministries despite various limitations and checks over them.

The relations between Ministers and Governors were marked by courtesy, friendliness and helpfulness. Instead of pursuing a policy of wrecking the Constitution, the Ministers had attempted to expand the bounds of that Constitution by constitutional pressures from within rather than by assault from without. This was recognized even by British critics of the Congress.¹²

Such being the bona fides of the Congress, to deny it the right of self-rule in 1942 and that also when the minorities were also willing to join them in the interim National Government, leaves one with an impression that the imperialist designs and considerations, still held the ground. The lessons of history were there to remind them that in the

¹⁰ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, 1959), p. 52.

¹¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi, 1961) p. 463; see also Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942* (Delhi, 1958), p. 35.

¹² R. Coupland, *Indian Politics 1936-1942* (London, 1944), pp. 154-7, 188.

light of growing intense feeling of Indian nationalism withdrawal of their power was inevitable. Yet they did not see the wisdom of withdrawing in good time with the goodwill which voluntary abandonment would have brought them.

It may be suggested here that if the Churchill Government had not sabotaged the Cripps Mission, India's partition in 1947 might have either been avoided or delayed. The negotiations on the Cripps Mission clearly indicate that though the long-term political interests were left uncompromised, the Muslim League was willing to sink its differences with the Congress and participate with it in the interim National Government during this critical period.

Other minorities, except a few, would have perhaps followed suit. This would have provided an opportunity for them to come closer and sink their differences while cooperating with each other as partners in power. Since the Draft Declaration had stipulated that India would be virtually free soon after the war, this was the right moment for the British Government to relinquish its control over India in its own interests as well as in the interest of the Indian unity and territorial integrity.

The British Government, however, did not want it as it was unwilling to part with powers and thus had brought the negotiations to an abrupt end. Political expediency led Cripps to the turn table and charge the Congress with the desire of establishing a majority rule aimed at tyrannizing the minorities with its control and supremacy over the Government.

This was trumpeted about to alienate the Muslims and other minorities and widen the already existing gulf between them. The fact remains that the constitutional issue relating to the minorities had not arisen during the negotiations and the question of proportion of various parties and communities in the interim government was not discussed at all.

The failure of the Mission brought about another spell of frustration wrapped in anger. It increased Indian hostility towards Britain which had not shown any genuine desire to part with power. The British misrepresentation of facts

and their propaganda to malign the Congress and its leadership added fuel to the fire. Disillusioned with Sir Stafford Cripps and his Mission, the nationalist movement expressed its complete disenchantment with the Colonial power on 9 August 1942 where the Congress launched the "Quit India Movement" under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

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Appendix I

DRAFT DECLARATION FOR DISCUSSION WITH INDIAN LEADERS PUBLISHED ON 30 MARCH 1942

The conclusions of the British War Cabinet as set out below are those which Sir Stafford Cripps has taken with him for discussion with the Indian leaders and the question as to whether they will be implemented will depend upon the outcome of these discussions which are now taking place.

His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of the promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.

His Majesty's Government therefore make the following declaration :

- (a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.
- (b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of the Indian States in the constitution-making body.
- (c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the constitution so framed subject only to:

- (i) the right of any Province of British India which is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides. With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new constitution, giving them the same full status as the Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.
- (ii) the signing of a treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other member States of the British Commonwealth.
- (iii) whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the constitution, it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its treaty arrangements, so far as this may be required in the new situation.
- (d) The constitution-making body shall be composed as follows, unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities:

Immediately upon the result being known of the Provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as the British Indian members.

- (e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organizing to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India.

Source : Maurie Gwyer and A. Appadoroi, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-47* (Bombay, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 520-21.

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